

# Wanderlust

## TRAVEL MAGAZINE

www.wanderlust.co.uk September 2015

**Win!**  
A photo commission  
to Western Australia  
See page 4

# CUBA

★ *Experience the Caribbean classic...*  
*before it all changes* ★

GO  
WILD!

Your month-by-month  
guide to spotting wildlife  
on your travels



- ◆ Tobago
- ◆ Seychelles
- ◆ Mount Fuji
- ◆ Australia
- ◆ Florida
- ◆ Secret Europe





# GREECE

ALL TIME CLASSIC

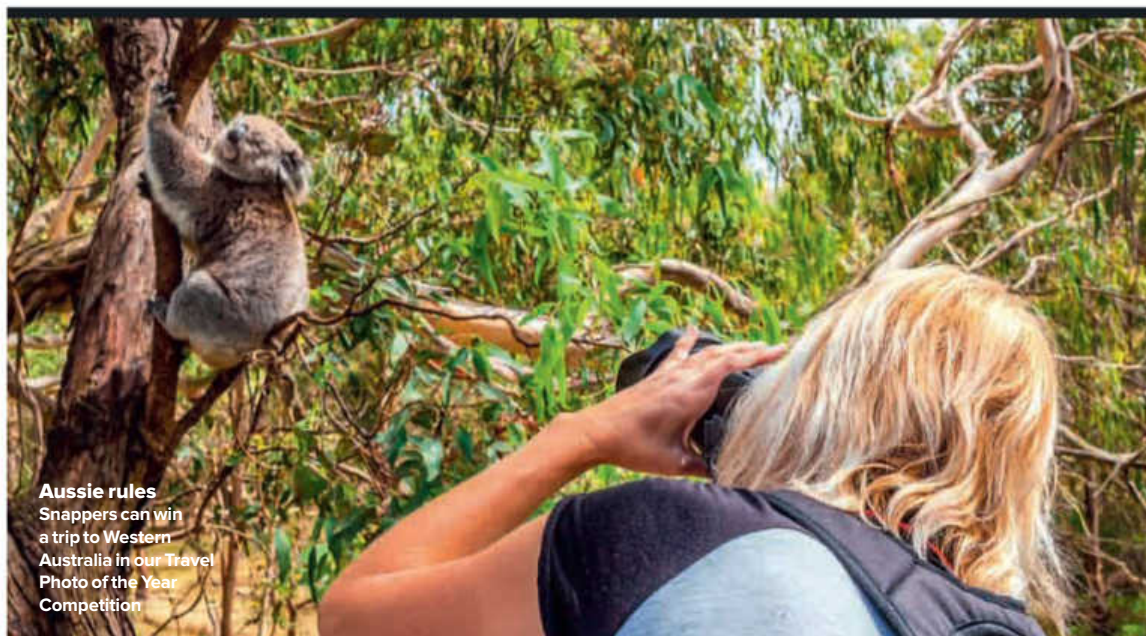
## MOUNT OLYMPUS

# WELCOME HOME

[www.visitgreece.gr](http://www.visitgreece.gr)

GREECE





**Aussie rules**  
Snappers can win  
a trip to Western  
Australia in our Travel  
Photo of the Year  
Competition

# Welcome



Have you been to Cuba yet? It feels as if the world and his wife want to get there this year, with a huge increase in tourism predicted from both the USA and China. Another recent change has been the growth in *casa particulares* – private homes in which you can stay (something rarely allowed when I was there two decades ago). On page 24, Chris Moss encourages us to use them for a flavour of the real Cuba.

With wildlife watching a big part of many of our travels, we have taken our binoculars to Tobago for a spot of bird watching (p108) and produced a month-by-month guide on what to see where worldwide (p40), from snow monkeys to Komodo dragons, gray whales and more.

Talking of whales, since a far-too-brief visit to Western Australia earlier this year in search of killer whales and more, I've been extolling its virtues – magnificent scenery, wildlife, walking and wines – to anyone who'll listen. So, it's with huge pleasure that I can announce that WA is our partner in this year's Travel Photo of the Year Competition, and the four winners of the amateur categories will win a photo commission Down Under. Find out how to enter on page 86.

Happy snapping!

*Lyn*

**Lyn Hughes**  
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

## 5 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

**1** Certain species of Peru's macaws like to lick clay, a natural antidote for plant toxins in its rainforests; p40

**2** You can find a geocache on the International Space Station; p60

**3** Ants can be used as a substitute for stitching up wounds; p66

**4** The *coco de mer* palm produces the largest seed – shaped like a woman's bum – in the world; p76

**5** The Swedish take their cinnamon bun-guzzling *fika* (coffee break) seriously: when hosting the rule is to make seven types of cookies for guests; any more or less is rude; p16



## THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?



**PHOEBE SMITH**  
♦ EDITOR ♦

Gasping at the sunrise in Japan from the top of Mount Fuji  
**SEE PAGE 90**



**SARAH BAXTER**  
♦ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ♦

Craning her neck skywards to catch sight of Tobago's best birdlife  
**SEE PAGE 108**



**TOM HAWKER**  
♦ PRODUCTION EDITOR ♦

Eyeing up the islands of the Seychelles: he's in paradise!  
**SEE PAGE 76**



**RHODRI ANDREWS**  
♦ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ♦

Lacing his boots ready to geocache in Britain's hidden treasures  
**SEE PAGE 60**

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**TRY FIVE ISSUES OF WANDERLUST FOR £5\***

**SEE P38 FOR DETAILS**

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## Wanderlust

For people with a passion for travel

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**Zoe** Office dog

In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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### US DISTRIBUTION

Wanderlust, ISSN 1351-4733, is published monthly except Dec/Jan and Jul/Aug combined issues and is distributed in the USA by Pitney Bowes International Mailing Services Inc as mailing agent. Periodicals postage paid at Kearny, NJ and additional mailing offices.

### CONTRIBUTIONS & WORK EXPERIENCE

For details please go to [www.wanderlust.co.uk/aboutus](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/aboutus)

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Printing Wyndeham Roche, Victoria Business Park Roche, St Austell, Cornwall PL26 8LX

### Newstrade distribution

COMAG Specialist: 01895 433800

Footnotes maps Digital Mapping (Tel: 02920 912192)

Office camera Nikon D80

Video camera Sony DCR-SR72

Office binoculars Swarovski EL 8x32s

Staff travel insurance InsureandGo

## This issue was brought to you in part by...



### ERIC LIS

Founder of Canadian micronation, the Aerican Empire

Eric, a psychiatrist from Montréal, founded the Aerican Empire in 1987, when he was just a child, but it has since got its own currency, flag, anthem and passport stamp. He gives us his theory on the rise of micronations – see p12

### Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Mountain.

### First great travel experience?

London in July. The weather, the people, the mix of modern and historic, the amazing museums and – as a huge geek – Hamleys Toy Shop and 221b Baker Street.

### Favourite journey?

A walking tour of San Francisco, discovering the city and the life of Joshua Norton, first Emperor of the United States.

### Top five places worldwide?

Montréal, Canada; London; San Francisco; New York City; Boston.

### Passport stamp you're proudest of?

The Aerican Empire, of course!

### Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Switzerland.

### Guilty travel pleasure?

Eating as unhealthily as I want!



### CHRISTY WECKNER

Globetrotting geocaching go-getter at [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com)

An avid traveller and geocacher, Kirsty helps to run community website [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com). In this issue, she gives us the

lowdown on the global treasure hunt – see p60

### Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Mountain.

### First great travel experience?

I went from Seattle to London when I was 11 to meet my parents while they were on holiday. England is a fantastic destination for families and kids. What kid can resist the Tower of London and going on a private tour behind the face of the clock at Westminster?

### Favourite journey?

Road trips to go skiing at Whistler, Canada, or Big Sky, Montana, are always fun.

### Top five places worldwide?

Le Panier Bakery, Seattle; Göttingen, Germany; Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil; Amsterdam, Netherlands; Zermatt, Switzerland.

### Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Ukraine.

### Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Sweden.

### Guilty travel pleasure?

Haribo sweets!



### KEITH PARTRIDGE

Adventure cameraman and photographer

Keith recaps 20 years behind the lens in the wildest, most dangerous places in new book *The Adventure Game*. He gives us his top tips on getting the best shot of a dramatic place – see p64

### Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

I've spent a lot of time in all of them but especially mountains. That's where I cut my adventurous teeth, so if I had to choose one, that's it.

### First great travel experience?

My first trip onto Iceland's Vatnajökull Icecap in winter 1990. We were so up against the conditions – epic would be an accurate description.

### Favourite journey?

The flight into the Cirque of the Unclimbables in Canada's Northern Territories. It's a very remote, staggeringly beautiful, wild untameable land.

### Top five places worldwide?

Iceland; Alaska; the Eiger; Canaima National Park, Venezuela... [Number five remains a mystery! – Ed]

### Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Papua New Guinea, twice!

### Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Chile. Patagonia is very much at the top of my list.

### Guilty travel pleasure?

A decent malt whisky.

## Wanderlust Mission Statement

Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.



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**Kick off the dust**  
A Land Rover  
adventure is the most  
exciting way to  
experience Namibia



# Your wild Namibia ride

*Land Rover, Abercrombie & Kent and the Namibia Tourism Board have teamed up to provide Wanderlust readers with an exclusive offer on an epic 11-day adventure*

**N**amibia is Africa with bells on, a million facets in one country, from the desert drama of Sossusvlei to the wildlife-rich waterholes of Etosha National Park. Simply, there is no better place to run the state-of-the-art Land Rover Discovery 4 through its paces than this wild, unrelenting terrain. And there's no better company to partner with **Land Rover** to arrange that 4WD adventure than **Abercrombie & Kent**, which launched its first African safaris over 50 years ago.

Namibia is the adventure capital of Africa. Where else can you scale a 350m-high dune, drive yourself around great game reserves and fly over the desert in a hot air balloon before setting off to spot whales in the crashing Atlantic? The off-road driving over endless sands, salt pans and rugged wilderness turns the action levels up to 11, ensuring a once-in-a-lifetime, adrenalin-fuelled ride. But, in contrast, the country also offers the other extreme: when darkness falls, all is still and silent, resting under a matchless blanket of stars. Namibia is practically out of this world.

## Ultimate off-roading

The action-packed 11-day *Land Rover Adventure by Abercrombie & Kent* begins in Namibia's capital, Windhoek, where after an introduction to your Land Rover, you'll set off across the dramatic Naukluft Mountains to Sossusvlei, on the edge of the Namib Desert, with highly experienced Land Rover instructors on hand with advice should the terrain become testing.

After a starry-skied night at Kulala Desert Lodge, a dawn hot-air balloon safari awaits. This is followed by a drive through the red dunes, salt pans and 900-year-old skeleton trees of ghostly Deadvlei.

Next you'll traverse the spectacular Gaub and Kuiseb Canyons, across the Namib plains, north-west to Walvis Bay. Among palm-lined coastal dunes, you'll bed down at your luxury lodge on Pelican Point, with time spare for dolphin-watching.

The adventure then advances into the more remote Kunene region of Damaraland,

to Desert Rhino Camp. Here you'll join the Save the Rhino Trust for a chance to see endangered black rhino. In the shadow of the Etendeka Mountains, you'll be able to push your driving skills amid the rocky hills and water crossings. Finally you'll head east

to Etosha National Park and

Ongava Lodge game reserve, home to elephant, leopard, springbok and more.

*Enjoy the drive...*

### EXCLUSIVE OFFER FOR WANDERLUST READERS!

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**Abercrombie & Kent**

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For more information visit **[www.abercrombiekent.co.uk/landrover/namibia](http://www.abercrombiekent.co.uk/landrover/namibia)**



# CONTENTS

Issue 159  
September 2015



## 360° – NEED TO KNOW

- 6 Viewfinder** Croatian markets, starry nights and wolves on the prowl...
- 12 Need to know this month...**  
The rise of the micronation
- 14 Go now** Marvel at magical medieval architecture in Lublin, Poland
- 16 Eat this...** Grab a cinnamon bun for *fika* – Sweden's non-negotiable coffee break
- 18 5 minutes with... Dan Snow**  
The presenter chats Indian train travel
- 20 Know your... Cow Ball**  
Party in the pastures in Slovenia
- 22 Secret Europe** Nine trips to show off the continent's hidden spots

## TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

- 60 The masterclass** Take part in the world's biggest treasure hunt: get the lowdown on the geocaching craze
- 62 Ask the experts** This month: birding city breaks, Iceland and Himalayan walks
- 64 Take better travel photos** BBC cameraman Keith Partridge explains how to snap the world's most dramatic places
- 66 Travel clinic** Dr Jane teaches first aid in the wild, from makeshift slings and bandages to using ants as stitches – yes, really!
- 73 Traveller's guide to... two-person tents** We test six of the best free-standing tents for your next camping adventures

### ▲ Cover story

**24 Cuba**  
With change imminent in Cuba thanks to the breakthrough in its relations with the USA, we stay in the Caribbean island's homestays to find out what the locals really make of it all

### ▲ Special feature

**40 Go Wild!**  
Find out when and where you can experience the most extraordinary wildlife encounters on the planet – without the crowds – with our handy month-by-month guide

WIN!

A trip to Western Australia or £3,000 in the *Wanderlust* Travel Photo of the Year, p86

A GoPro or iPad Mini, p118

139

"Perched atop a rock off the west coast of Normandy, this World Heritage site is a bastion straight from the imaginations of Tolkien and Peter Jackson." *Paul Bloomfield*

New Orleans, p70

Castillo de San Marco, p141  
Cuba, p24

Tobago, p108

24

"In Cuba, where the gap between the official version of life and the reality of ordinary citizens is immense, sharing someone's private space is like peeking behind a veil, sharing a secret." *Chris Moss*

"This Florida fort was built by the Spanish in 1672 to safeguard the gold shipped over from the Caribbean. It changed hands several times before being taken by the Americans."

141

108

"From our vantage, we found raucous skies. Everywhere squadrons of magnificent frigatebirds were air-bombing red-billed tropicbirds, terrorising them into releasing the fish in their beaks. It was celestial carnage." *Sarah Baxter*



# LARGER-THAN-LIFE LANDS...

## Micronations, p12



### FEATURES

- 76 Seychelles on a budget**  
A drop of paradise in the Indian Ocean: we show how to enjoy its astonishing wildlife and cultural riches on a shoestring
- 90 Climb Fuji** Take a hike up Japan's iconic mountain, then discover other trekking peaks all around the world
- 108 Tobago** Grab your bins and hit this Caribbean gem's bounty of birds which thrive in its rugged rainforest home
- 120 The beauty of the bothy** Did you know you can take refuge in a stone shelter – for free! – while scrambling around the UK's rugged wildernesses? Read on...

### FROM THE ROAD

- 102 Your Story** Latin American hiking isn't just about the Inca Trail – reader Daniel Davies-Llewellyn takes an alternative jaunt through Bolivia
- 106 Letters** In our mailbag: Naked bike riders outside Buckingham Palace; a *Wanderlust* article sparks fond memories of elephants; and readers remember their trips to some of the world's wildest frontiers
- 107 This Month You Have Been...** Exploring Easter Island; motoring on the Mongol Rally; comprehending a trip back to Chengdu; pedalling the Loire Valley; rainforest treasures; and much more...

### POCKET GUIDES

- 137 First 24 Hours: Perth, Australia**  
Australia's capital of the West might just be Oz's most liveable city, thanks to its sunny climate, natural beauty and forward-thinking mentality
- 139 Short Break: Mont St-Michel**  
Free from its concrete causeway, this French icon looks more majestic than ever, perched on its rocky outcrop
- 141 Travel Icon: Castillo de San Marco, Florida, USA**  
You'll feel more like you're in Spain than Florida: this fortress is the crown-jewel of St Augustine, one of the USA's oldest European settlements

© BBC/Andrew Hayes-Wardkins

**76**

"I looked out over a string of tiny jewel-like islands, verdant oases fringed with blindingly white sand floating in an expanse of dazzling blues." *Sarah Gilbert*

**90**

"A glow appeared on the horizon, barely a tangerine smudge. Then it began to grow, appearing as a thin line, then a perfectly round orb, intensifying, expanding, lifting." *Phoebe Smith*

**137**

"If you visited even ten years ago, you will be surprised by the changes now. The city is growing, the population is increasingly more diverse, and there is a real buzz about the place." *Lyn Hughes*

**Perth, p137**

**TALKING HEADS**  
Dan Snow, p18

"When I visit India my stomach turns to liquid. So I just take it on the chin and get stuck in."

**Bothies, p120**

**Lublin, p14**

**Mont St-Michel, p139**

**Slovenia, p20**





## STARRY NIGHT California, USA

Photographer: **Dan Barr**

Night skies in wild places can often be impressive. However, American snapper Dan Barr has made the firmament over Green Lake, California, truly alien and arresting. He used a long exposure to take this shot, which is one of the shortlisted entries in the Royal Museums Greenwich Insight Astronomy Photographer of the Year 2015 competition.

As a warming campfire glows orange against the still, silent backdrop of the Hoover Wilderness, the streaks of the stars prove that the world just goes on turning.

To see more shortlisted entries, visit [www.rmg.co.uk](http://www.rmg.co.uk). The winner will be announced on 17 September



# 360°

V i e w f i n d e r











## MAZY MARKET Croatia

Photographer: **Davor Rostuhar**

This Dolac market in the Gornji Grad-Medveščak district of Zagreb resembles something more like an adventure playground for Pac Man than a bustling city market. But aerial photography does things like that – it offers a whole new take on a familiar place or setting. This overhead view, taken by photographer Davor Rostuhar using a drone, brings the market – one of Zagreb's busiest – to life and is a place where farmers and fishmongers sell everything from plump figs to fresh squid.

To see more of Davor's work, visit [www.davorrostuhar.com](http://www.davorrostuhar.com)





## **WOLF HIGHWAY** Minnesota, USA

Photographer: **Joel Sartore**

The pink sunset glow gives Minnesota's vast, wild North Woods a misleading sense of serenity as a pack of wolves hunt for their next meal... as they themselves are targeted. The woods are popular with local holidaymakers and hunters alike. Joel Sartore's image highlights the ongoing issue of wolf hunting – subject of an ongoing political argument – and is one of a number of images included in the Natural History Museum's book *50 Years of Wildlife Photographer of the Year*, celebrating five decades of the competition, raising ecological awareness and the rapid evolution of photography too.

© **Joel Sartore. 50 Years of Wildlife Photographer of the Year (Natural History Museum, £25) is available now**







# 12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your September essentials: Dan Snow tries India's railways; Swedish coffee snacks; cow parties in Slovenia; discover Europe's best secret spots

# 1

■ Travel issues

## Starting your own country is on the rise

As three new self-declared nations claim an area of Europe, we look at how you can add even more countries to your wishlist...

**E**ver got sick of the way things are run in your own country? Ever found yourself muttering "if I were in charge..."? Well some people decide to act on it and actually start their own country. Introducing the 'micronation', basically a legally unrecognised country that lays claim to land that is either disputed or its members believe to be unadopted.

Three new micronations have already been formed this year. The Free Republic of Liberland, the Kingdom of Enclava and the Principality of Ongal all lay claim to land along the Croatia-Serbia border opened up by the 1990s Yugoslav Wars.

Within the last 10 years, the number of micronations has risen – more than 100 of them now exist in the world today.

So are they real countries and can you visit them? While none have been officially recognised – it takes a defined territory, permanent population and a capable government for that to happen – you can still pay some of them a visit.

"Tours are given free of charge by the monarchy and there's no limit on photos," says Lord Steven Baikie, from the Principality of Hutt River in Australia – which requires a passport and visa payment if you want to enter.

Some places, like Whangamomona Republic in New Zealand, are an easy visit with no border controls, but others – as with Liberland – are off limits (Croatia has blocked access there since its inception). Then there are the marketing savvy ones – the UK micronation

of Sealand offers official stamps, currency, flags and the chance to become a Lord, Baron or Knight.

But why are more of them cropping up today? "The internet," says Emperor Eric Lis of the 28-year-old Aerican Empire, a

Canadian micronation. "It inspires copycats."

So though we travel aficionados may have thought there was a finite number of places for us to visit, it turns out that number is growing all the time. So grab your passport and start making a new must-travel list – now where do we book a flight to Ladonia..?

**'Within the last 10 years the number of micronations has risen to over 100'**



Cathy Images



**King of the castle**  
 “Arise, Sir Wanderlust!”  
 All over the world  
 people are creating  
 their own micronations

## ■ The Nitty Gritty

**Here's five more teeny micronations you (probably) didn't know existed...**

### **1 North Dumpling Island**

A private island owned by Segway inventor Dean Kamen a mile off the coast of Connecticut, he declared he was breaking away from the United States after he wasn't allowed to build a wind turbine.

**2 Sealand** This disused Second World War sea fort off the Suffolk coast was initially set up as a pirate radio station by Paddy Roy Bates. In 1978, the inhabitants had to overcome an invasion by Dutch and German mercenaries.

### **3 Principality of Hutt River**

Australia's oldest micronation, it was born in 1970 after farmer Leonard Casley and the government disagreed about crop sales but now welcomes 40,000 visitors per year.

### **4 Naminara Republic**

Created as a tool to boost tourism to Namiseom Island in South Korea, the ploy seems to have worked – 1.5 million people visit the wildlife-laden micronation each year.

### **5 Kingdom of North Sudan**

Founded on the promise that he would make his daughter a princess, American Jeremiah Heaton has laid claim to Bir Tawil, an 800 sq mile unclaimed slice of land between Sudan and Egypt.

### ■ Micronations Map

We scoured the globe for a list of micronations per continent and it seems they're everywhere!





New Routes

GO  
NOW...

**Sweeping chimneys**  
Lublin's impressive architecture survived the Second World War's brutality



## 2 Lublin is bubbling with medieval charm and architecture

### ? Why go? Been to Krakow?

Then it's time to try Lublin, Poland's lesser-known architectural gem. With Wizz Air launching flights from Glasgow and Doncaster Sheffield to the eastern Poland city from September, you can marvel at 'Little Krakow's' medieval magic all the more easily.

Once there, get an overview of the Old Town by climbing the 14th century Chapel of the Holy Trinity, lavished with impressive Russo-Byzantine frescoes.

Then head to the rest of the Royal Castle, before exploring the Dominican Priory.

For a sombre reminder of the horrors of the Second World War, Majdanek concentration camp lies on the city outskirts.

In the evening check out the theatre hub, with more than 20 venues dotted around, offering a rich variety of Eastern European performing arts.



### Where to stay?

The characteristic Hotel

Waksman is slap-bang in the centre of Lublin, making it a handy option. B&B rooms from 230zł (£40); [www.waksman.pl](http://www.waksman.pl)



### Get there now!

From 16 September, Wizz Air flies Glasgow-Lublin with two flights a week. From 15 September, Wizz Air will also run flights three times a week from Sheffield Doncaster Airport too. Fares from £98 return; [wizzair.com](http://wizzair.com).



### Or how about these...

From 16 Sept, Wizz Air will also launch twice-weekly flights between Glasgow and Vilnius, Lithuania. Fares start from £33.98 return; [wizzair.com](http://wizzair.com).

On 10 Sept, Austrian Airlines will launch daily Manchester-Vienna flights. Fares from £169 return; [uk.austrian.com](http://uk.austrian.com).

British Airways is also launching new six-weekly Gatwick-Vienna flights, from 17 Sept. Fares from £85 return; [britishairways.com](http://britishairways.com).

TV

## 3 WATCH THIS...

### India Season

BBC, Out on August/Sept (TBC)



The BBC is heading east to India this Autumn for a massive celebration of the diversity, culture and people of this travel icon. This series of shows and documentaries are headlined by *Sue Perkins in Kolkata* (BBC1), while Dan Snow takes us behind the scenes of *The World's Busiest Railway 2015* (BBC2). Read our interview with Dan on pg 18.

Cinema

## 4 SEE THIS...

### A Walk in the Woods

Out in cinemas on 18 September



Robert Redford is Bill Bryson... there's five words that we (and we suspect Bill) never thought we'd say. But this is a genial adaptation of Bryson's comic travels along the 3,540km Appalachian Trail in the north-eastern US, as he tries to reconnect with his home after two decades abroad, trailed by his shambling pal Katz (a scene-stealing Nick Nolte).

Gear

## 5 BUY THIS...

### Mountain Hardwear Dynama

£50, [mountainhardwear.com](http://mountainhardwear.com)



It can be tricky finding trousers to travel in – versatile enough to be comfy-yet-smart on a plane and suitable for walking trails and sightseeing too. These are the answer. Made from lightweight, stretchy and water-repelling fabric, they look smart, are robust enough for hikes and the stretchy waistband stops any discomfort when flying.



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Lyn Hughes, Editor-in-chief, Wanderlust Magazine

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Photo by WF client Kieron Nelson, Karakoram Highway

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■ World Food

## EAT THIS...



6

## Get baking for Sweden's bun day

**F**ika – or, taking a coffee break – is firmly embedded in Swedish culture. But it's more than just stopping for a hot beverage – it's a way of life. The Swedes love coffee. Per capita, they gulp down an average of 39 gallons a year.

The practice of fika is adhered to religiously, daily. Swedes plan their days around it – whether they take it at work or at home, with family, colleagues or friends. Fika is not simply about a cup of coffee, it's a social event. And having something to eat is just as essential.

"In Sweden, when there's company, you serve coffee; and serving coffee without something to eat alongside is simply unthinkable," explains Anna Brones and Johanna Kindvall, authors of *Fika: The Art of the Swedish Coffee Break*.

What's more you'll find this ritual across the country. From enjoying a cuppa and cake in a farmhouse in the hinterlands of Värmland, to drinking java with a slice of *mandelkaka* (almond tart) in Malmö or munching on *kladdkaka* (sticky chocolate cake) with your coffee in a bustling Gothenburg café. When entertaining, the rule of thumb is to provide seven types of cookies – if you make six, it's an insult, and eight is seen as too flashy.

But with pastries, there's one undisputed champion: *kanelbullar*, or cinnamon buns. As Anna and Johanna put it, kanelbullar is "the quintessential component to a Swedish coffee break"; the buns even have a day devoted to them (Kanelbullans Dag, 4 October).

So grab a friend, get a batch of dough in the oven and relax with a coffee, Swedish style...

## KANELBULLAR

## Makes 30 buns

**For the dough:**

7 tbsp unsalted butter

360ml milk

2 tsp active dry yeast

638g all-purpose flour

50g natural cane sugar

1½ tsp whole cardamom seeds, crushed

¼ tsp salt

**For the filling:**

7 tbsp unsalted butter, room temp

99g natural cane sugar

3-4 tsp ground cinnamon

2 tsp crushed cardamom seeds

**For the topping:**

1 egg, beaten

Pearl sugar or chopped almonds

## Method

**1.** Dough: melt butter in a saucepan, then stir in milk. Heat until warm. In a bowl, dissolve yeast in 2-3 tbsp of the mixture. Stir and let sit for a few mins until bubbles form on top of the yeast.

**2.** In a bowl, mix the flour, sugar, salt and cardamom. Add yeast mix and the remaining butter and milk. Work together until you can make the dough into a ball.

**3.** Knead the dough until smooth and elastic (3-5 mins). If it sticks to your fingers, add a pinch of flour. Return dough to the bowl, cover with a tea towel and place in a draft-free place for it to rise until double in size (about 1 hr).

**4.** Filling: cream the butter together with the sugar and spices with a fork until it makes a spreadable paste.

**5.** When the dough has risen, take half and roll into a 28 x 43 cm rectangle. Spread half of the filling on top of the rolled-out dough. Roll the dough upward and divide into 15 slices and place rolled side up on a greased baking sheet. Repeat with second half of the dough and cover the buns with a tea towel and let them rise for 45 mins.

**6.** Brush buns with a beaten egg and sprinkle with pearl sugar. Bake for 8-10 mins at 225°C. Add 10 mins baking time if baking more than half of the buns.

## TOP TIP

Instead of rolling the dough to make the classic Kanelbullar bun shape, you can also make twists or a length to cut a design into (as pictured) to let the filling ooze out a little.



**Fika: The Art of the Swedish Coffee Break by Anna Brones & Johanna Kindvall (Ten Speed Press, £9), out now.**





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inaccessible<sup>®</sup>



# 7 ■ Five minutes with... DAN SNOW LOVES THE INDIAN RAILWAYS

For the BBC's India Season, the presenter headed to Mumbai to experience the hustle-bustle of *The World's Busiest Railway*. We found out how he got on...

## How long did you spend in Mumbai making the show?

It was a great trip – I loved it! I got three weeks out there; I got to walk every day and get a real feel for the place. I had a really interesting few weeks in the city and spent a lot of time walking, just trying to get under its skin.

## What should we do when we're in Mumbai?

What I always think with cities is: hit the streets. It's weird because I spend a lot of time filming within museums and galleries but within the city I like to walk, walk and walk, and eat the street food. The highlights of Mumbai are the extraordinary municipal parks, which date back to the British period, and of course the waterfront. Mumbai has a massive port, and if you want to understand the city you have to visit there.

## Does riding the Indian railways put train travel in the UK into a different perspective?

It absolutely does. We're very lucky. You could look at the problems confronting developing countries, and there are still so many brakes on their development – transport and

infrastructure are a huge area where they are going to have to spend billions and billions just to catch up with where we are today. That's a brutal challenge for their economy.

## Filming in the hectic rush hour must have been a real challenge to film, for you and the commuters?

I think I must have been really annoying for them but no one ever said anything. What was funny was that they couldn't believe people were out there filming their rush hour – it was a very good-humoured rush hour. I think it is telling that people weren't particularly aggressive, they just regarded us as dry amusement and just shook their heads at us crazy foreigners.

**'You can travel a lifetime but only scratch the surface of this wonderful planet'**

## How did the cameramen feel about this?

It was very challenging for them. It was about 45°C – unbelievable. On some of those trains and platforms, it was just ridiculous. We were being jostled and thrown all over the place.

## What do the locals really think about the trains?

The locals love the trains because they are so iconic but they are also aware that the trains need updating. They're no fools and know they're a long way from the rest of the world.

## What would be your top tip for getting the train in rush hour?

Keep your head – do what you do in the west, ask for directions and don't get into panic mode. It will all make sense. It takes

a few minutes to get what their system is but it all works very well and it's very efficient. Go there and get stuck in, as if you're a commuter.

## How do you avoid Delhi-belly?

When I visit India my stomach turns to liquid. So I just take it on the chin and get stuck in.

## You've travelled large sections of the planet. What have been your highlights so far?

I really liked Hawaii. I was expecting it to be like Lanzarote and have no interest in it at all but I found it absolutely beautiful and a wonderful place to go. I loved Canada – I'm half-Canadian. I think Canada has one of the most stunning landscapes. For me it's the best-kept secret on the planet. It is not that far away and it is the closest nation on earth to Britain in terms of our culture, our humour and our familial links. It's a very odd gap in the British awareness and I just think it's a total joy. I also love the Middle East – I love the food, the people, the conversation and I love the history.

## What would your British highlight be?

It is very hard to look past the west coast of Scotland. But if you get the right time of year and the wildflowers are out, driving from the New Forest to Wiltshire you do not see an ugly scene – you're looking around and everything is perfect. Just a short train ride from most urban centres, there are wonders on this island that can compete with anything in the world.

## Is there anywhere left on the to-go list?

I've done very little work in South America or China and I don't know the west coast of America as much as I should. I've spent very little time in Eastern Europe and I've never been to Africa. You can travel a lifetime but only scratch the surface of this wonderful planet.

## What's the first item that goes into your travel bag?

I'm afraid I'm going to be unromantic but it's actually my smartphone because it's such an amazing tool. I'm driving around Lebanon and I see a castle and I just Google it and then you've got all the information about that bloody castle straight away.

*The World's Busiest Railway* (BBC2) is part of the BBC's India Season, starting from late August (TBC)



## What's On 8 UK EVENTS

### ADVENTURES IN WILD BRITAIN – AN EVENING WITH PHOEBE SMITH

London, 9 Sept

www.stanfords.co.uk  
Stanfords, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9LP.  
Tickets £3 (redeemable against a copy of one of Phoebe's books).

Join our very own editor for an evening of bivvies, bothies and beyond! Phoebe will be giving ideas for wild UK weekends, talking about her Extreme Sleeps Challenge, and giving sage advice on how to stay safe in the wilderness.

### THE CRUISE SHOW

Birmingham, 12-13 Sept; Manchester, 26-27 Sept; Glasgow, 10-11 Oct

www.cruisingshow.co.uk

NEC Birmingham, B40 1NT; Manchester Central, M2 3GX; SECC Glasgow, G3 8YW.  
Tickets £10 (£6 in advance), under-16s free.

Whether you're a newcomer ready to plan your first voyage or a regular looking to expand your horizons, the Cruise Show offers oceans of inspiration. Discover far-flung destinations, gain expert knowledge and advice, and bag yourself show-only offers and upgrades. *Wanderlust* readers also receive an extra treat: two-for-one tickets! Quote 'Wanderlust' when ordering online or by phone (0871 620 4024).

### WANDERLUST WORLD GUIDE AWARDS

London, 13 Oct

www.worldguideawards.co.uk  
Royal Geographical Society, SW7 2AR. Tickets £5 (including a drink), available via website or by calling 01753 620426.

Meet with the globe's best travel guides and hang out with the judges – including Bill Bryson – and the *Wanderlust* team too at our annual World Guide Awards. Find out who's won the coveted Gold award – receiving a bursary of £5,000 – and enjoy a free drink afterwards, covered in the dirt-cheap ticket price. Buy now and we'll see you there!

### FAMILY TRAVEL SHOW

London, 31 Oct-1 Nov

www.familytravelshow.com

Olympia, London W14 8UX. Day tickets £12 (£8 in advance), weekend £15, under-16s free.

Proving that you can have an off-beat trip with the kids, the Family Travel Show is full of ideas to suit every household – from intrepid adventures to thrilling wildlife safaris. Celebrity speakers, travel bloggers and industry experts will give talks and tips to help inspire your next jaunt, and there are show-only offers too. *Wanderlust* readers can get half-price tickets when booked in advance for only £6 – quote 'Wanderlust' when booking online or by phone (0844 209 7360). Ten free pairs of tickets are also up for grabs – visit [www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions) for more details.

## Read this...

# 9 Read yourself inspired

The latest book from Paul Theroux, plus UK inspiration via walks and waterways

**P**aul Theroux's new book takes him a long way away from the exotic trains that made his name – though the southern states of America may as well be a foreign country to him. His look at the *Deep South* (Hamish Hamilton, £20) casts an ever-sharp eye over life, history, community and hospitality below the Mason-Dixon line while taking a scalpel to the literature that over romanticises it.

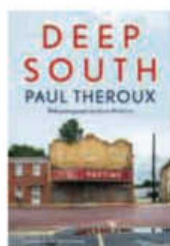
Poet Simon Armitage stays on home turf too, amiably ambling along the South West Coast Path in *Walking Away* (Faber & Faber, £17) – a warm companion for anyone planning on tracing the fringes of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.

Slightly grumpier company is Steve Haywood, who's following Britain's

waterways from the deck. *Narrowboat Nomads* (Summersdale, £10) is full of Haywood and his wife's canal-side views and domestic blitzes as they putter through Wales, the Midlands and the Thames heartland.

An alternative view of the UK is also offered by *The Land Of The Green Man* (IB Tauris, £20). Carolynne Larrington illuminates how shallowly the UK's rich folklore and mysticism lie under the surface.

Alexander von Humboldt is a bit of a legend too, a cornerstone for Darwin, John Muir and the eco movement. *The Invention Of Nature* (John Murray, £25) by Andrea Wulf tracks Humboldt's discoveries, and follows his ideas as his ripples become tidal waves of progress. Extraordinary, and often still sadly very relevant too.



## 10 The Big Debate Would you go virtual over a real guide?

As a new Google Glass app provides virtual audio and visual tours of Roman London, it got us thinking: would you choose a virtual tour over a human guide?



### YES

**Tom Hawker, *Wanderlust's* production editor**

"The guidebook is evolving, and now tech can provide different options that even a human guide can't – the app here has extra visual info. So while they seem gimmicky (and expensive) now, eventually these digital guides will have instant access to a specialist's worth of history, as well as all the practical info – perfect for the traveller who really wants to fly solo."



### NO

**Julia Hammond, *Wanderlust* reader**

"There's no substitute for the real thing. When I've used a human guide, it's because I've wanted their expert opinion; guides have contacts in local places that you just wouldn't have as an outsider. Also, I like to switch off my mobile during the day so I can't check my emails. And I think the sun would be too strong in some places to see the screen!"

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Instant Expert

# KNOW YOUR... COW BALL

**Pasteurised party**  
The bovine ballers get ready for the festivities



11

September in Slovenia? Must be time to throw a party in the pastures, but there's more to this festival than lively livestock

**E**very year, deep in the mountains of Slovenia, a party is thrown when the cow herds leave the high pastures and return to the lowlands for the winter. In the Bohinj Valley, this traditional transhumance is marked by the Cow Ball (Kravji Bal), which celebrates its 59th year on 20 September 2015.

## Really? A ball for cows?

Yes indeed. Daisy and her pals are the stars of the show here. The cows are kitted out in ribbons, wreaths and bells, and paraded alongside their herdsman. Local cheesemen and milkmaids parade too, accompanied by the folk sounds of fiddlers and accordion players, and the blasts of a full brass band. Stalls flank the procession through the

valley, selling pungent cheeses, wooden sculptures, wicker baskets and a range of other local foods and crafts.

## Can visitors join in?

Absolutely. It is positively encouraged for onlookers to get involved – just be prepared to get a bit sweaty. Learn to labour like a local Slovenian, trying your hand at the age-old practices of log-sawing, horseshoe-making and sling-shooting. Or, if you can't stop tapping your feet to the music, there's the chance to learn a local dance or two.

## I want to stay a bit longer. Anything else to do?

Definitely. The festival is based on the shores of Lake Bohinj, within Triglav

National Park – towering 2,864m Mount Triglav (Slovenia's highest) lords over the valley. This means there's a treasure trove of hiking routes and walking trails on the doorstep, with routes wending over the plateaus of Pokljuka, down the troughs of Tolminka and up mighty Triglav itself.

But Slovenia is a wonderfully compact country, so none of its highlights are very far away. A 90-minute drive will take you to the majestic Škocjan Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site recognised as one of the biggest underground canyons in the world, complete with waterfalls, 30m drops and giant chambers. The capital, Ljubljana, is also less than an hour away by car – sit by the Sava River with a slice of *potica* (Slovenian cake with walnuts) and take a stroll through its pretty Old Town.





Find out more • [ospreyeurope.co.uk](http://ospreyeurope.co.uk)



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# 12 FIND SECRET EUROPE

## PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: [mytripfinder.co.uk](http://mytripfinder.co.uk)



1

**T**hink you know Europe inside and out? Well think again... the continent is better than most at keeping hidden secrets and these nine trips prove that there is always another off-the-beaten-track route, little-known hike or rare rambling route just around the corner...

### 1. Greece

Walk in Aristotle's footsteps

Explore the Macedonian, Roman and Byzantine eras of lesser-visited Greece as **Ramblers Worldwide Holidays'** new *Olympiada* tour winds back the clock. Visit the ancient city of Stagira, birthplace of philosopher Aristotle, before hiking parts of his namesake trail along with the Marmari peninsula, Ammouliani Island and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Mount Athos.

**Who:** Ramblers Worldwide Holidays (01707 331133, [ramblersholidays.co.uk](http://ramblersholidays.co.uk))

**When:** 17 Oct, 23 Apr, 21 May, 24 Sept 2016 & 15 Oct 2016

**How long:** 7 nights

**How much:** From £775 (incl flights)

### 2. Slovenia

Explore caves, castles and culture

Slovenia may be modest in size but it's big on dramatic natural scenery. Explore one of Europe's greenest countries with **Imaginative Adventures'** *Slovenia Revealed* tour. Gasp at lakes Bohinj and Bled, dip into the vast UNESCO-listed Skocjan Caves, visit medieval Predjama Castle and wander the cities of Ljubljana, Maribor and Ptuj – the country's oldest.

**Who:** Imaginative Adventures (01728 888030, [imaginative-adventures.com](http://imaginative-adventures.com))

**When:** May-Oct

**How long:** 7 nights (5 night trip also available)

**How much:** From £1,275 (excl flights)

### 3. Spain

Hunt for the elusive lynx

Written Andalucía off because you think it's full of busy resorts? Step away from the hotspots to find wildlife of a different kind. Visiting the Doñana National Park and the rugged Andujar Natural Park, **The Travelling Naturalist's** *Spanish Lynx Quest* tour offers the chance to spot one of the world's rarest cats, the Iberian lynx, as you trek through wildlife-laden Mediterranean forest.

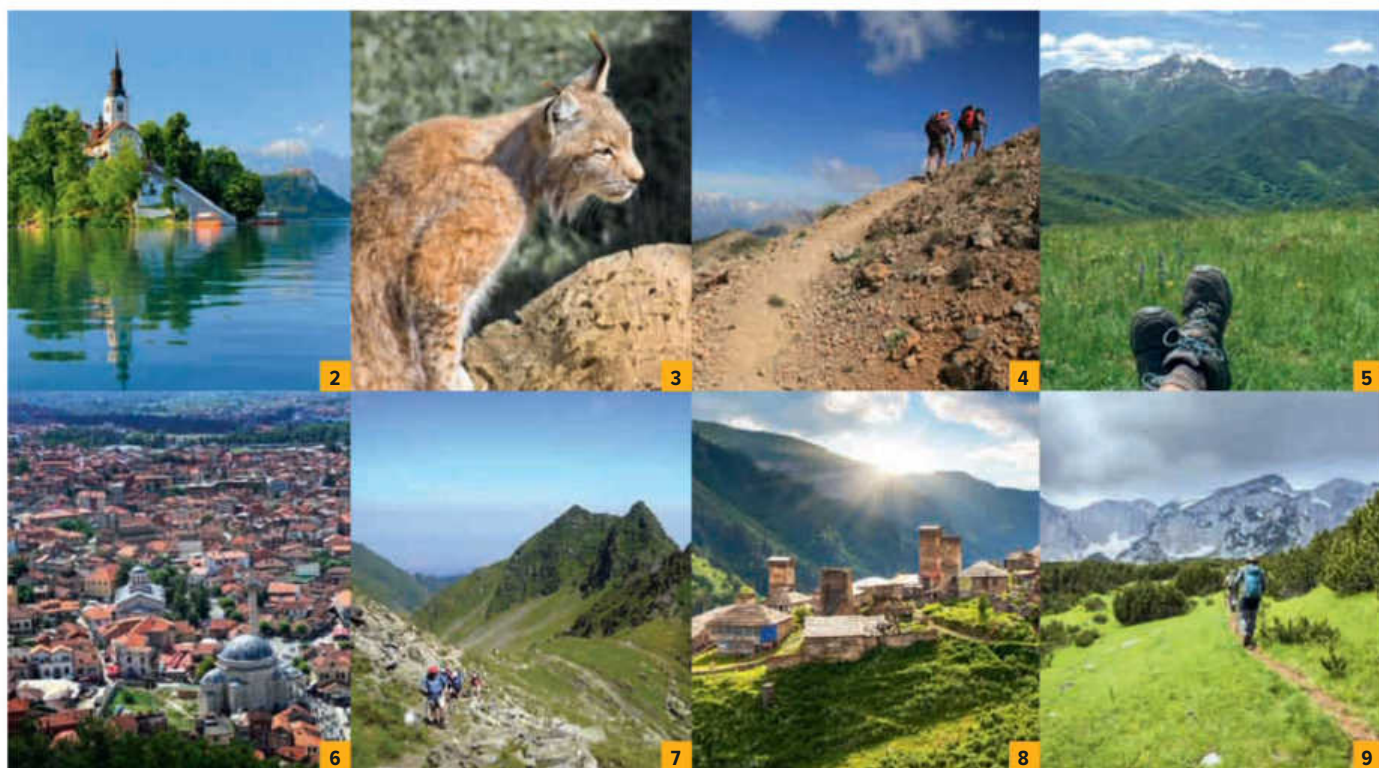
**Who:** The Travelling Naturalist (01305 267994, [naturalist.co.uk](http://naturalist.co.uk))

**When:** 24 Oct 2015, 27 Feb & 22 Oct 2016

**How long:** 7 nights

**How much:** From £1,395 (incl flights)





## 4. France & Italy

Discover the Alps' hidden corner

Seek out the quieter spots of the Alps with **KE Adventure's** *Alpine Trails and Summits of the Queyras* hiking trip. You'll be climbing 1,000m a day but the rewards are magnificent. Topple the snow-capped peaks of Rocca Bianca, Pain de Sucre, Grand Glaiza in the alpine region of Queyras, enjoy your mountainside lunches in the company of marmots, chamois and golden eagles before resting those weary legs in a cosy wooden chalet.

**Who:** KE Adventure (01768 773966, keadventure.com)

**When:** 19 Jun, 21 Aug & 11 Sept 2016

**How long:** 8 days

**How much:** From £845 (excl flights)

## 5. Spain

Marvel at majestic peaks

Cast your net away from the nearby bustling coastal cities of Gijón and Santander and instead visit traditional rural Spain with **Pura Aventura's** *Picos Inn to Inn* trek. Wind through the Liebana Valley in the Picos de Europa

mountains – you could be lucky enough to spot brown bears. Enjoy a mountain meadow meal of wood-baked bread, local cheeses and chorizo and listen to the sound of cowbells as you descend into the medieval town of Potes.

**Who:** Pura Aventura (01273 676712, pura-aventura.com)

**When:** May-Oct

**How long:** 7 nights

**How much:** From £980 (excl flights)

## 6. Albania, Kosovo & Macedonia

Discover the treasures of the Balkans

This little-visited trio on **Explore's** *Undiscovered Balkans* tour are all rich in history and varied in scenery. Highlights include Macedonia's Lake Ohrid, Albania's Valbona Valley and Kosovo's 14th century UNESCO-protected Decani Monastery. Toast them all in Rahovec, known as the wine cellar of Kosovo.

**Who:** Explore (01252 883812, explore.co.uk)

**When:** 13 Sept & 20 Sept

**How long:** 13 nights

**How much:** From £1,495 (incl flights)

## 7. Romania

Spook yourself at Castle Dracula

Sink your teeth into **Walks Worldwide's** *Land of Dracula* tour in myth-shrouded Romania, a country untouched by mass tourism. Hike amid the forests, peaks and ancient history of Transylvania's rugged Carpathian Mountains en route to Castle Dracula – the home of the legendary vampire.

**Who:** Walks Worldwide (01962 737565, walksworldwide.com)

**When:** May-Oct

**How long:** 8 days

**How much:** From £895 (excl flights)

## 8. Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia

Carve through the Caucasus

For something a little different try this history-rich country combi. All three are littered with centuries-old architecture: Azerbaijan boasts palaces and 6,000 rock engravings at Qobustan National Park, in Armenia magnificent monasteries abound and Georgia offers colonial cathedrals and its 12th century cave town of Vardzia.

**Peregrine Adventures'**

*Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia*

tour will show you all the highlights.

**Who:** Peregrine Adventures (0207 408 9021, peregrineadventures.com)

**When:** May-Oct

**How long:** 16 nights

**How much:** From £2,345 (excl flights)

## 9. Bosnia & Herzegovina

Hike amid primeval forests

Divert east of more popular Croatia to immerse yourself in ancient woodland, hidden waterfalls and glacial lakes on **Exodus' Walking in Bosnia & Herzegovina** trip. Explore the primeval trees of Sutjeska and the beech forests of Perucica; climb Bosnia's highest peak (2,386m Maglic Mountain) and visit Lukomir, its highest village.

**Who:** Exodus (0845 805 7193, exodus.co.uk)

**When:** 10 Sept 2015

**How long:** 8 nights

**How much:** From £1,299 (incl flights)

**MORE ONLINE** We couldn't fit all the best big trips on these pages! So, to see even more, go to [wanderlust.co.uk/159](http://wanderlust.co.uk/159)



Cuba is on the verge of monumental change  
– but what do the locals make of it? Stay in the  
island's network of homestays to find out

WORDS **CHRIS MOSS**

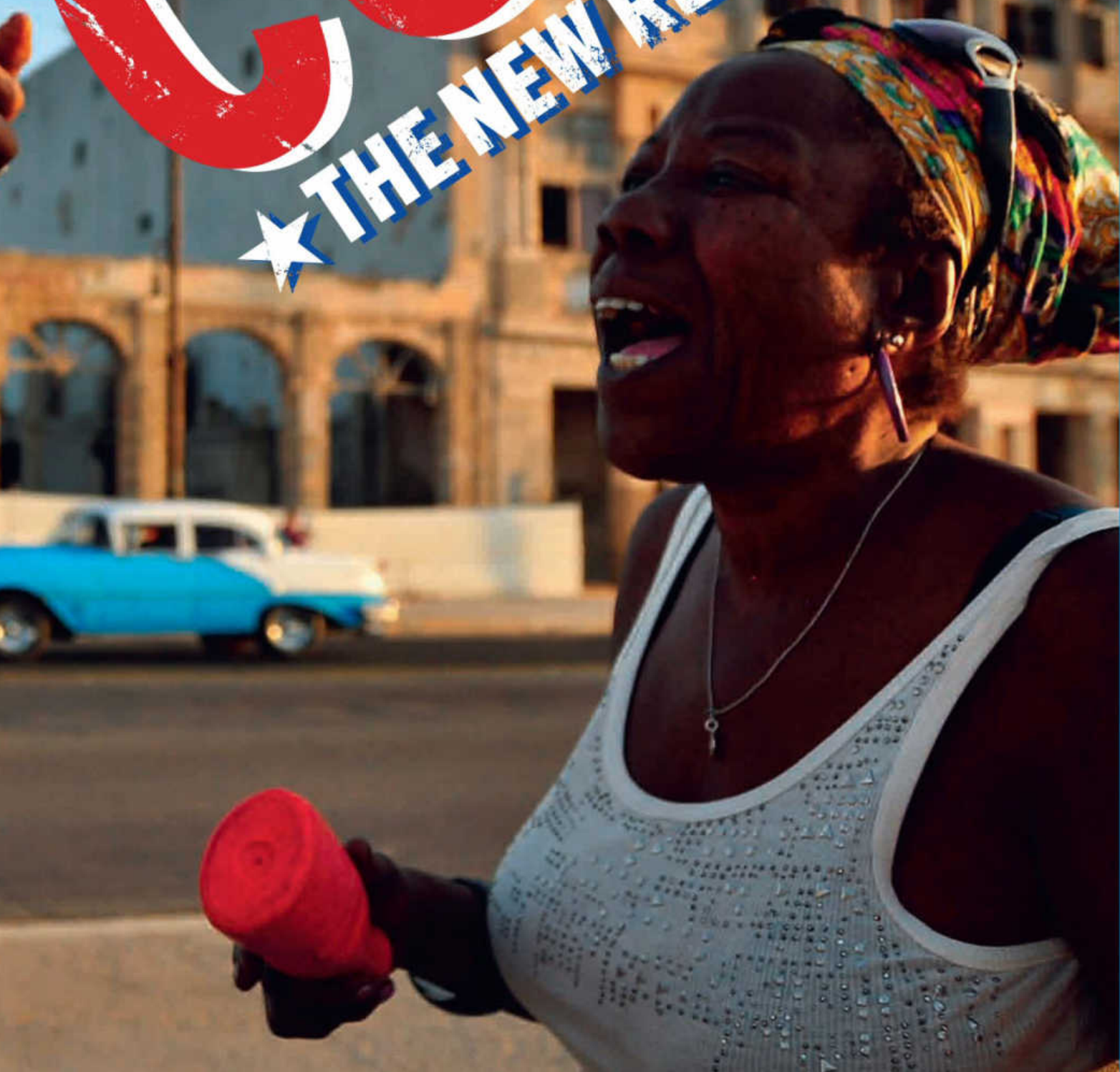
**Singing in  
the streets**  
Havana locals  
react to news  
that the US  
is changing its  
policy with Cuba





# CUBA

★ THE NEW REVOLUTION?







**T**

he house was the kind you imagine in your Latin American dreams: high ceilings, dark wood furniture, family insignia frosted on the windows, morning sun streaming through white lace curtains. Tropical fish mooched around an aquarium, tropical birds twittered in an antique cage. Coffee bubbled on the hob. And there was art everywhere. José Toirac is one of Cuba's most respected artists but,

because gallery spaces are rare and expensive, if you want to see his drawings, paintings and installations, you have to visit his house.

I took in a painting he'd made of a dead Che Guevara. The cadaver was covered in tallies adding up to 638, the reported – but unverifiable – number of attempts on Fidel Castro's life to date. Another work showed Che's profile in gold leaf, an allusion to his putative sainthood. I'd already had an eyeful of Ernesto – the posters, the souvenirs and the tribute on Havana's Plaza de la Revolución – but Toirac's art deconstructed all the hagiography and summoned a contemporary spirit into the nostalgia-laden house.

After talking me through his works, José – because we were now on first-name terms – poured me a coffee and chatted to me about the USSR and pop art, politics and travel. There's nothing like being at home to make people relax and open up. In Cuba, where the gap between the official version of life and the reality of ordinary citizens is immense, sharing someone's private space is like peeking behind a veil, sharing a secret.

## On the edge

I was in Cuba in the spring after President Obama announced his plan to reestablish diplomatic relations between Washington DC and Havana, after a half-century of mutual – and sometimes belligerent – mistrust. Tourism was booming, the result of the desperate dash to experience Cuba before it's overwhelmed by tourists from its big capitalist neighbour or – worse – significantly changed as a result of this new development. It also meant all the hotels were booked. As a virtuous consequence, I was spending a week staying only in private houses – or *casas particulares* – a nice way for residents to make a little extra money. This would provide me with a close-up of a country on the cusp of... something.

My home from home on Calle Línea, a busy thoroughfare in Havana's Vedado district, was another stately affair. It had a long, dark hallway and a patio at the back bursting with tropical plants, the walls painted in distressed lemon and peach. Here I breakfasted on papaya and toast, and freshly brewed coffee. After my second cup, I went down the corridor to collect my passport – Cuba's one of those bureaucratic countries where you have to be registered with 'the authorities' every day – and bumped into the proprietor.

"Buenos días," he said. "I'm Don Cecilio Martínez – everyone calls me Chilo." I asked how things were going with the easing of tensions with the US. "We've had four or five revolutions," he barked, "but the only one anyone knows about is the 1959 one. Yes, we need the changes – we need technology, transport, tourism. We could be a very rich country. It's not easy, you know, having a country like that on your doorstep."

He spat this out, and then went on to damn Blair and Bush. He talked about Obama's Janus-like behaviour: "There must be two ►



**Havana highs**  
Che Guevara dominates  
the Plaza de la Revolución  
while the National Capitol  
Building looks over the  
Parque Central







◀ Obamas – the one that everyone sees, and the real one who is sincere and good.”

He talked for ten minutes without taking a breath. Chilo said he was in his late 70s and had seen it all. I commented on his good health and how he must have looked after himself.

“I smoke two packets of cigarettes a day,” he said, pulling out a fag and lighting it. “I have a glass of rum whenever I want one, and I enjoy a cigar.”

The dirty perfume of the latter drifted around the corridors of Chilo’s house. There was something decadent about the place, as there was about his politics: the revolution was “necessary”, and yet here was one of the old guard renting out a room on the open market to a tourist. With the temperature rising on my patio and the humidity beginning to impose its languorous weight on everything, I decided to go out and explore.

## Change you can believe in

I spent a couple of days exploring Havana. I walked everywhere, following the Malecón – the curving esplanade that follows the seawall – all the way into the old town. Many of the grandest buildings, especially the seafront mansions of Centro Habana, had been damaged beyond repair by the salty spray.

Refurbishment works are visible across the city, though. La Habana Vieja – the historic centre, where most of the hotels and tourism is focused – is littered with scaffolding. New bars and restaurants are opening all the time, hotels are being modernised,

**‘The historic centre is littered with scaffolding, new bars are opening all the time – there’s definitely change in the air’**

and the streets are full of new cars as well as the vintage Pontiacs and DeSotos. There’s definitely a sense that change is in the air.

I spent a morning admiring the Cuban art section of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. The large, well-lit modern gallery of colonial-era, modern and

contemporary works helped me make

connections between the country’s bourgeois past and the Communist present – and all those revolutions that Don Camilo had insisted I needed to know about.

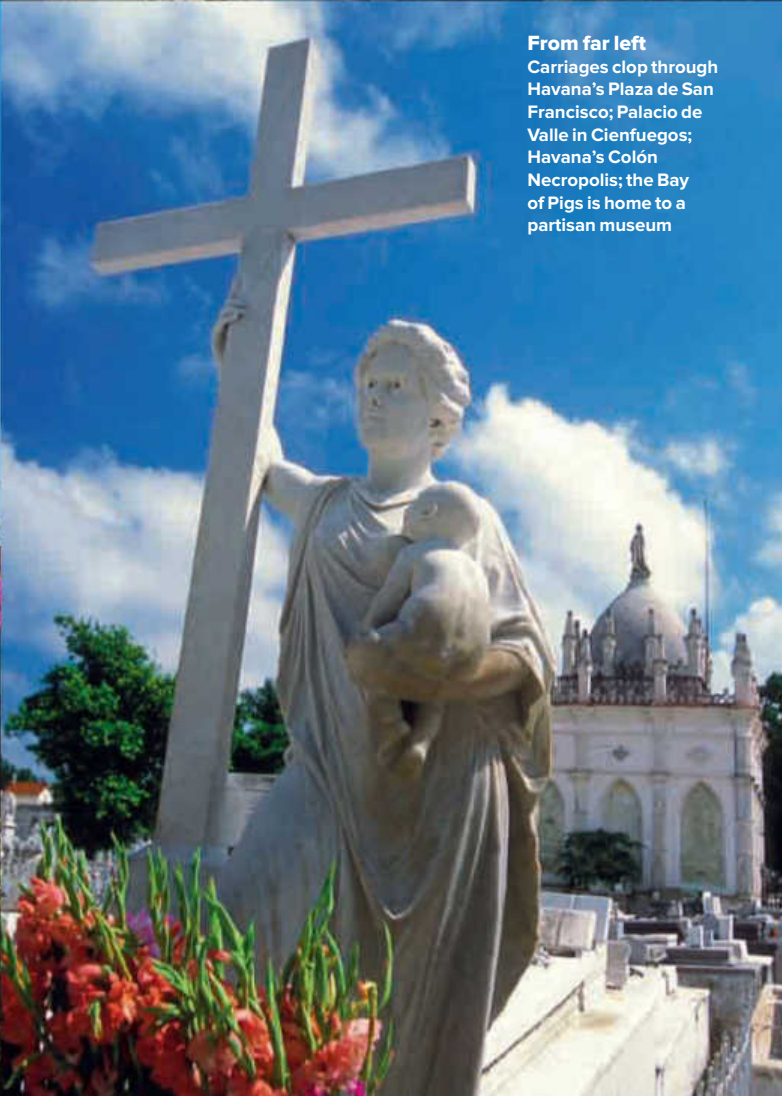
Casa Camilo was convenient, but Línea was full of bars and clubs – and all-night salsa. On a Saturday morning I moved out to Casa Belkis, in a residential part of Vedado, close to the huge Colón necropolis. Here I had an entire apartment to myself, with a kitchen and living room – all for £20 a night. I wandered around the cemetery’s monumental avenues – messy death turned into cold marble and ornamental ostentation – and then along a busy avenue, full of cafés that ordinary Cubans frequent on their days off.

Alessandro was the owner of a newly opened pizzeria; as he served me a delicious and dirt-cheap pizza, he told me he had married a Cuban in Italy and migrated to Havana. The island is more famous for exporting exiles and desperate escapists, so I asked Alessandro if his situation was becoming more common. “I’ve met a few,” he said. “The European situation is terrible. It’s much better here.”

## Out of Havana

You could have a great Cuban adventure visiting houses in Havana and dining out, but capital cities rarely reflect national attitudes. ►





**From far left**  
Carriages clop through  
Havana's Plaza de San  
Francisco; Palacio de  
Valle in Cienfuegos;  
Havana's Colón  
Necropolis; the Bay  
of Pigs is home to a  
partisan museum







**Viva la revolución!**  
Che and co adorn a  
Havana wall – but for  
how much longer?





## Colourful Cuba



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◀ I hired a car – sadly, only a modern Isuzu – for the highway trip and, with my driver Felipe, headed east. I wanted to see farmland and wilderness, the uncluttered beaches of the Caribbean coast, the beautiful provincial cities of central Cuba and the people who reside in them.

Once I left Havana's suburbs, the side of the almost traffic-free highway was taken over by crops of pineapple and banana, maize and mango. Hoardings paid homage to Fidel, Che, Hugo Chávez and Henry Reeve, an American who fought in the pro-Independence Liberation Army against the Spanish at the end of the 19th century.

After a couple of hours we turned on to a back road through the vast swamplands of the Ciénaga de Zapata, where palm trees and tall reeds provided a habitat for herons, buzzards and egrets. The 60-something Felipe regaled me with stories about the revolution, baseball, fighting in Africa, women, sex and music. He'd been a radio soap-opera writer in a previous life and had been around the island, and the block, many times.

The swamp meets the sea at the Bay of Pigs. In the town of Playa Girón was a museum dedicated to the 1961 invasion by CIA-sponsored paramilitary forces. Shunning any kind of objectivity, the machine guns, uniforms, photographs and news reports were captioned with anti-American propaganda. The 'Imperialist Cowards' had been 'Heroically Resisted' by the 'Faithful Followers of Fidel'.

## Old town, new faces

Further east, in Cienfuegos, I stayed with husband and wife Ricardo Peña and Hortensia Vizarino. Before I went off to explore the city, we had coffee and cake, and Ricardo showed me his beloved 1950s Austin A30 – where, during the following two days, he spent every spare minute bent double in the tiny passenger seat trying to untangle a complex knot of ancient wiring.

Cienfuegos was founded in 1819, making it one of Cuba's oldest cities – its colonial centre is a neat and tidy UNESCO-listed assembly of handsome apartment blocks, pastel-painted facades and lively ice-cream parlours, bars, restaurants and shops. At the town's

southern end was Punta Gorda, a slender peninsula where I popped into the wedding-cake building that used to house the Yacht Club; old photographs showed the smiling faces of the well-heeled crowd pre-1959. One of the faces

belonged to Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado, unknown to me. He was, in fact, president of Cuba from 1959 to 1973 and had spent his pre-revolution days, like Fidel Castro – prime minister during those years – very much a member of the Cuban upper-classes.

When I got home that evening, Hortensia was talking on the telephone for a long time. When she hung up she looked worried. "I was chatting to my mother. She lives in Alabama. She came to visit two years ago but I don't think she'll be coming again. She's 94 and we just daren't risk her falling ill here." ►

**'The 60-something Felipe regaled me with stories about the revolution, baseball, fighting in Africa, and women, sex and music'**



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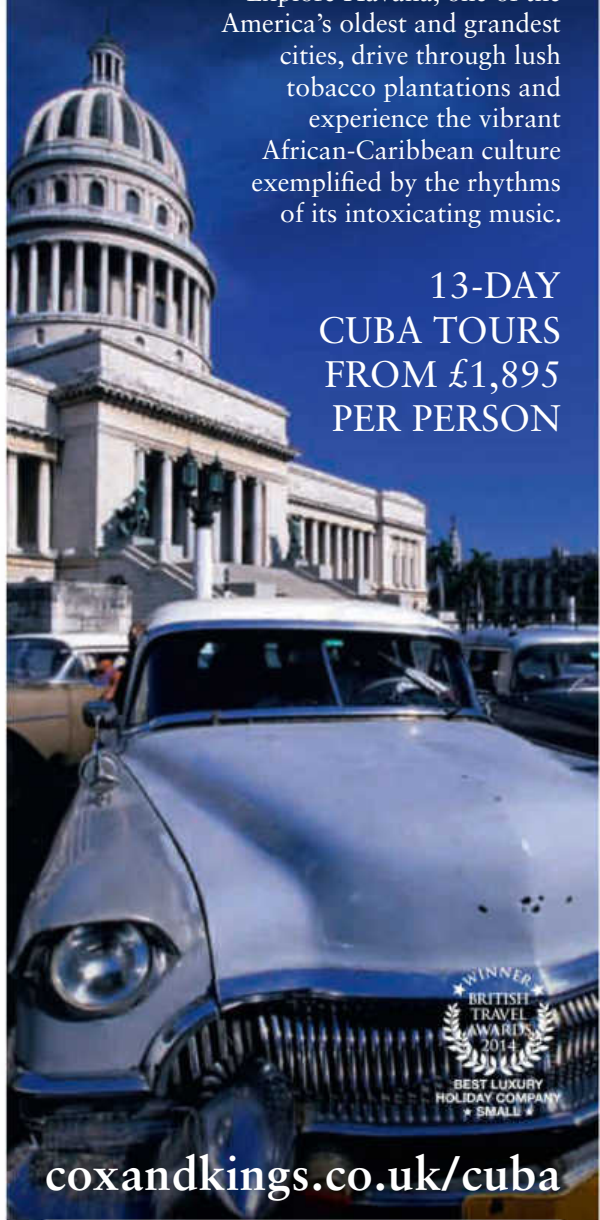
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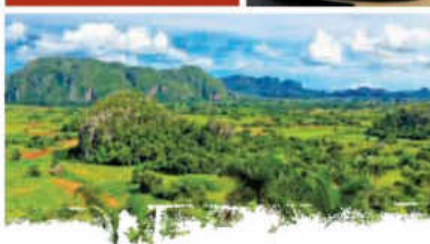
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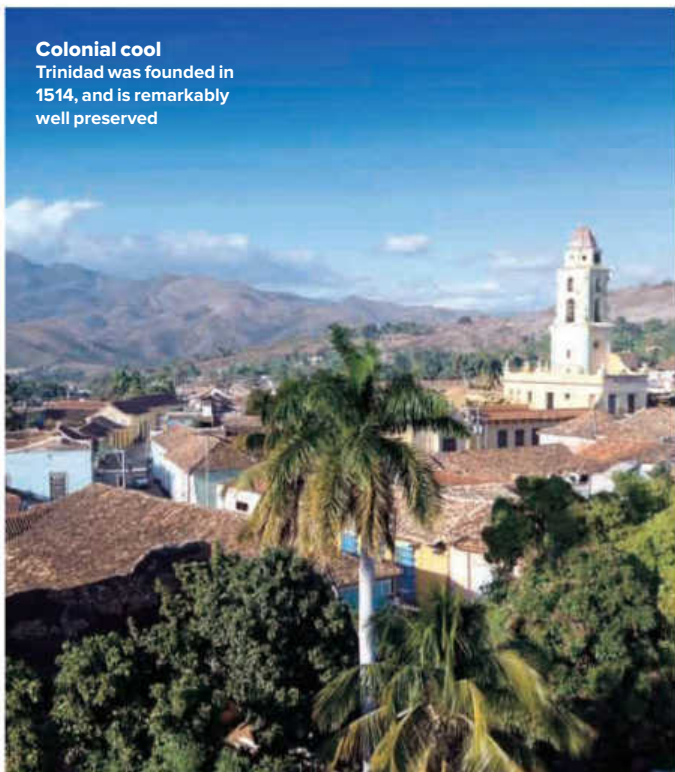
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**Colonial cool**

Trinidad was founded in 1514, and is remarkably well preserved



◀ The warming up of the relationship between Washington DC and Havana is too late for her mother, but Hortensia remains upbeat. “We can’t carry on being enemies like this,” she said, “we are too close to one another.”

## Meeting Che

An hour’s drive west of Cienfuegos is the prettiest of all Cuba’s colonial treasures. Trinidad, founded in 1514, is all low-slung adobe buildings and streets paved in stones that seem to tumble down the hill on which the city was sited. Its remarkable state of preservation is partly due to the fact that the hinterland was never really allowed to evolve – it’s often overlooked that Cuba remained Spanish until 1898, and was, with Puerto Rico, Spain’s last colonial outpost in the West Indies.

My homestay was not one of the pricey old places in the centre but a modern, hostel-like building on the edge of the city. If it lacked character, it made up for it with panoramic views over Trinidad and cool breezes on the balcony where I breakfasted each morning. Afterwards I wandered around the churches and mansions and found a bench on the immaculately maintained plaza. The only passing traffic was a few cowboys on horseback and the occasional bust-up old car, the four-wheeled vehicles always moving more slowly and awkwardly over the rough cobbles than the four-legged ones.

Felipe took me to dine at a hotel on the coast, where I saw package tourists from Sweden and Germany being offloaded from coaches. The disembarked were corralled into queues to eat at the buffet, doomed to chat only to themselves. They probably had better air-con than me, but not much else.

I made a day trip to Sancti Spíritus, a less picturesque conurbation, best known for the handsome 1815 Yayabo Bridge, built from clay bricks. I skipped the Museum of the Guayabera – one Cuban shirt looks much like any other – and hung out with Felipe instead. He showed me the grocery-cum-electronics-cum-beer stores where Cubans use their own currency – the CUP (nation peso) – instead of the CUC (convertible peso).

**‘Few countries present barriers to comprehension like Cuba. The curvaceous cars, the sultry salsa and the tobacco-scented romanticism all collude to spin a pre-revolutionary fantasy’**

On the way back to Havana, we stopped off in Santa Clara. As we entered the city, I pulled my sunglasses down to protect my eyes from the glare of the midday sun and from the probable exposure of a thousand Che Guevaras. This was his burial site – his column liberated the small city in December 1958 in the revolution’s decisive battle – and there was bound to be a rush of iconography.

But as it turned out, Santa Clara had the usual count of murals and motifs, with the shops selling plaques of the beret-wearing, cigar-puffing Argentine legend alongside garish paintings of old American cars, salsa musicians and other tack. My mind flashed back to Toirac, whose work decoded – and quietly satirised – commie kitsch.


I strolled around the main plaza, Parque Vidal, surveying the palm trees, the old gazebo, the handsome Teatro La Caridad, built in 1885. But my gaze was drawn, inevitably, to the pig-ugly Hotel Santa Clara Libre on the plaza’s western edge – a classic piece of low-grade Latin American brutalism stapled to an otherwise convivial public space. The hotel used to be a Hilton, but that brand was ejected from the country shortly after the revolution; fittingly, the hospital-green façade was pocked by machine-gun fire dating from the 1958 battle.

On the edge of the city, the Che Guevara mausoleum was grandiose but not at all garish. The burial chamber was peaceful while the impressive reliefs showed the guerrilla hero’s march from west to east, and from lad to legend.

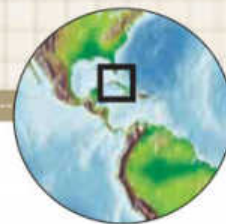
## Goodbye Havana

Coming back to Havana felt a bit like coming home. For a change I’d booked myself the Ambos Mundos for my last night, a near-legendary hotel due to the fact that room 511 was once occupied by that famous daiquiri-drinker Ernest Hemingway. The reception was stylish, the bar classy and the old cage-style lift – manned by a grumpy and officious attendant – was very 1930s. The room was small but handsome in an old-fashioned way. But, almost comically, there was no running water in my bathroom – with all the refurbishment taking place, it seemed some hapless builder had driven a pile into the water mains.

Few countries present barriers to comprehension like Cuba. The curvaceous cars, the sultry salsa, the tobacco-scented romanticism all collude to spin a pre-revolutionary fantasy. The military monuments, Skodas and propagandist hoardings work together to create a post-1959 one. Factor in Western prejudices and all your own baggage and a visit is ripe to lead to confusion.

Much of the pleasure to be had in this beguiling island nation derives from this, but a homestay experiences goes some way to cutting through the clichés and contradictions. At the same time, it takes you into the heart of a family, and of ordinary, everyday life. Everything is changing in Cuba; if you want to witness that, discuss it, and live a bit of it, then sleep in a casa – and you’ll open your eyes to a new perspective on the country every day. 





# Cuba Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Havana  
**Population:** 11.3 million  
**Language:** Spanish  
**Time:** GMT-4 (Nov-Mar GMT-5)  
**International dialling code:** +53  
**Visas:** UK nationals require a tourist cards (valid for 30 days). These cost £15 if you go to the consulate in person; there is an extra charge (£19) to apply by post. Airlines/tour operators can arrange this.  
**Money:** National peso (CUP), currently CUP1.24 to the UK£; this can be used at cinemas and local restaurants. However, tourists generally have to use the Cuban convertible peso (CUC), currently CUC1.55 to the UK£. There are ATMs in main cities. Check with your bank that your debit/credit cards will work in Cuba.

## When to go

|     |     |      |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Jan | Feb | Mar  | Apr | May | Jun |
| Jul | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |

■ **Dry season.** Plenty of sunshine; average temperatures in mid-20°Cs.  
 ■ **Hurricane season** – storms more likely; weather generally wetter.

## Health & safety

No special vaccinations are required. Chikungunya is present – protect against mosquito bites. Drink bottled water.

## Further reading & information

**Cuba** (Rough Guide, 2013) is the best of the travel guides, with excellent entries on politics, music and the arts.  
**cubadiplomacia.cu** Cuban Embassy  
**lata.org** Latin American Travel Association



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## THE TRIP

**i** The author travelled with **Audley Travel** (01993 838650, [audley.co.uk](http://audley.co.uk)), which can arrange a ten-day trip to Cuba, covering Havana, Cienfuegos and Trinidad, from £2,395pp, including three-star accommodation, international flights and guides.

## Getting there

**Virgin Atlantic** ([virgin-atlantic.com](http://virgin-atlantic.com)) flies London Gatwick-Havana non-stop. Economy returns start from £855; flight time from 9.5 hours.

## Getting around

**Viazul** ([viazul.com](http://viazul.com)) operates **buses** connecting Havana to the main cities. Havana-Cienfuegos takes around five hours; fares US\$20 one-way. A slow, infrequent, inexpensive **rail service** connects Havana, Cienfuegos, Santa Clara and Sancti Spiritus.

**Car hire** is possible. Prices start from around CUC40 (£26) a day. Global firms do not operate in Cuba; see [cuba-junky.com](http://cuba-junky.com) for a list of local firms. If you want to hire a driver, too, triple the rate.

## Cost of travel

Cuba is **quite expensive**, with the tourist currency designed to keep visitors away from local markets. Meals in small restaurants or *paladares* (private houses) cost £8-15. Hotels are expensive but **homestays start from £10** a night, usually including a simple breakfast. **Tips** are expected.

## Accommodation

**Casa Camilo** (Vedado, Havana; [casakmilo.com](http://casakmilo.com)) is a beautiful old house near the Malecón. The experience is slightly marred by the proximity of a lively bar. Rooms from CUC35 (£23).

**Casa Belkis** (Vedado, Havana; +53 17830 8402) is a quiet apartment with a kitchen and bathroom, close to Colón necropolis. Doubles from CUC30 (£19).

**Hostal Miraluna** (Trinidad; [hostalmiraluna@gmail.com](mailto:hostalmiraluna@gmail.com)) is a well-run hostel with a big kitchen and a balcony overlooking the city. Rooms are clean, with en suite bathrooms and air-con. Doubles from CUC28 (£18).

**Hortensia y Ricardo** (Cienfuegos; [hortensiavp@nauta.cu](mailto:hortensiavp@nauta.cu)) is a lovely colonial-style house with a real family atmosphere. Doubles from CUC30 (£19).

## Food & drink

No one goes to Cuba for its gastronomy. Cuban staples include *moros y cristianos* (rice and beans), grilled fish, *ropa vieja* (shredded beef), basic salads and fresh fruit – all tasty and nutritious. In smarter places, try the **lobster and other shellfish**.

## CUBA HIGHLIGHTS



### 1 Havana

Forever being refurbished, the Cuban capital is one of the world's urban marvels. The Malecón (sea wall) is mythically beautiful, the old centre is an architectural fantasia abuzz with new bars and galleries, and the residential districts of Vedado and Miramar are home to cutting-edge cultural spaces.

### 2 Cienfuegos

A statue of musical legend Benny Moré (pictured) in the main thoroughfare reminds visitors that the sounds of *son montuno* and *bolero* matter more to locals here than socialism. With its elegant historic quarter and adjoining peninsula, this UNESCO-listed city has a laid-back atmosphere and pre-revolutionary good looks.

### 3 Trinidad

One of Cuba's prettiest old towns, Trinidad (also UNESCO-listed) was founded in the 16th century but got rich much later on the sugarcane plantations of the nearby Valle de los Ingenios. Its sloping cobbled streets, lined with pastel-painted houses and mansions, make it ideal for walkers. A 20km taxi or bike ride south is the sweeping beach resort of Playa Ancón.

### 4 Santa Marta

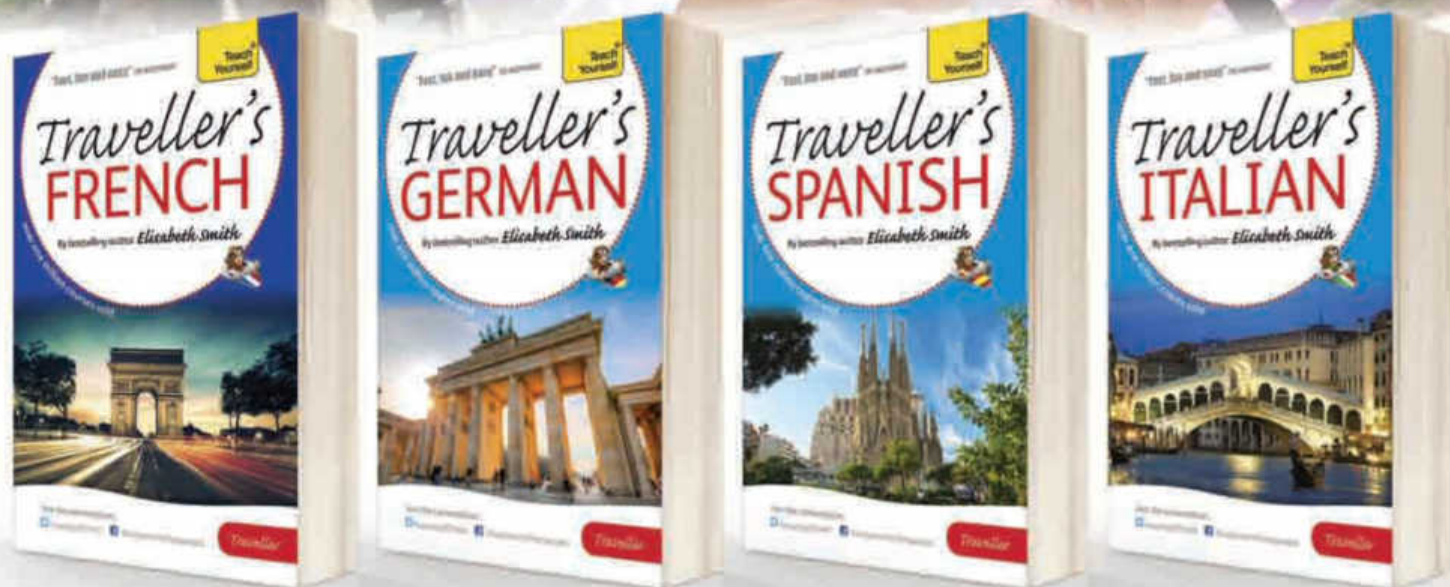
Santa Marta is worth a stopover for the Che Guevara mausoleum. It is bombastic on the exterior but subdued and serene once you enter the small cave-like space where the Argentine guerrilla and his fellow combatants are interred.





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A full-page background image showing a herd of zebras crossing a river. Some zebras are on the rocky bank, while others are in the water, creating splashes. The zebras' black and white stripes are prominent.

# PREPARE TO GO WILD

From Japanese monkeys in January to South Georgian penguins in December, with whales, tigers, bears in between... Our wildlife calendar says that whenever you want to travel, there's a remarkable encounter to experience



# January



## Antarctica

### For... NOISY PENGUINS

It's balmy high summer on the White Continent this month – a sizzling 2°C, with non-stop days, thanks to the midnight sun. All this gives rise to a peak in wildlife, specifically penguins. January is when the rookeries are at their most raucous as chicks – emperors, Adélies, chinstraps and gentoos – begin to hatch. You might spot emperors concealing their little 'uns inside their belly pouches. Or spy a creche waiting impatiently for food; it's not unusual to see chicks on a feeding chase, running after any old adult that's carrying a fish supper.

There's plenty of other wildlife too – baby seals and birds such as skuas and snow petrels. January is also when whale sightings start to pick up (peaking in February-March): look for signs of orca, sperm, humpback, fin and blue. If you opt for a later trip, Feb-Mar also brings fur seals, as well as moulting penguin chicks making their first breaks for the sea. Conversely, visit November-December to see a range of birds – from penguins to albatross – performing their mating rituals.

## Yellowstone, USA

### For... WOLVES IN SNOW

Brrrrr! It's chilly in Wyoming in January-February. But all the winter white powder makes Yellowstone's wolves much easier to spot: their grey fur stands out against the blank sparkle while their paw-prints leave a handy trail in the snow. Also, other animals – bison, elk, bighorn sheep – congregate for warmth at the park's steamy thermal features.

## Tambopata, Peru

### For... MASSES OF MACAWS

This national reserve in southern Peru boasts some of the planet's most biodiverse rainforest, home to 670 species of birds. Some of these, including six species of macaw, have a liking for licking clay (a natural neutraliser of plant toxins), and gather in great numbers at Tambopata's chuncho and Colorado colpas – two of the world's largest claylicks. December-January, when the local food supply is highest, sees peak numbers of these splendid birds nibbling the clay. Note, it is wet season, so bring a brolly.

## Southern Serengeti, Tanzania

### For... CALVING WILDBEEST

The northerly river-cavorting of the Great Migration usually steals the headlines (see August) but equally impressive is this gathering of the million-strong ungulate herds in the southern Serengeti, from January to March.

Feeding on the nutritious short grasses, untold numbers of wildebeest, zebra and gazelle give birth here en masse, attracting a host of hungry predators.

## Honshu, Japan

### For... SNOW MONKEYS IN SNOW

The Japanese macaques of Jigokudani Monkey Park are best seen in the snow – hence why they call them snow monkeys. They live in the park year-round, but are more likely to dip in the thermal hot springs in the coldest months of January and February. More photogenic, too. ►



**ALSO TRY:** Cozumel, Mexico – eagle rays • Bialowieza, Poland – bison & wolves • Monteverde, Costa Rica – resplendent quetzal



# February

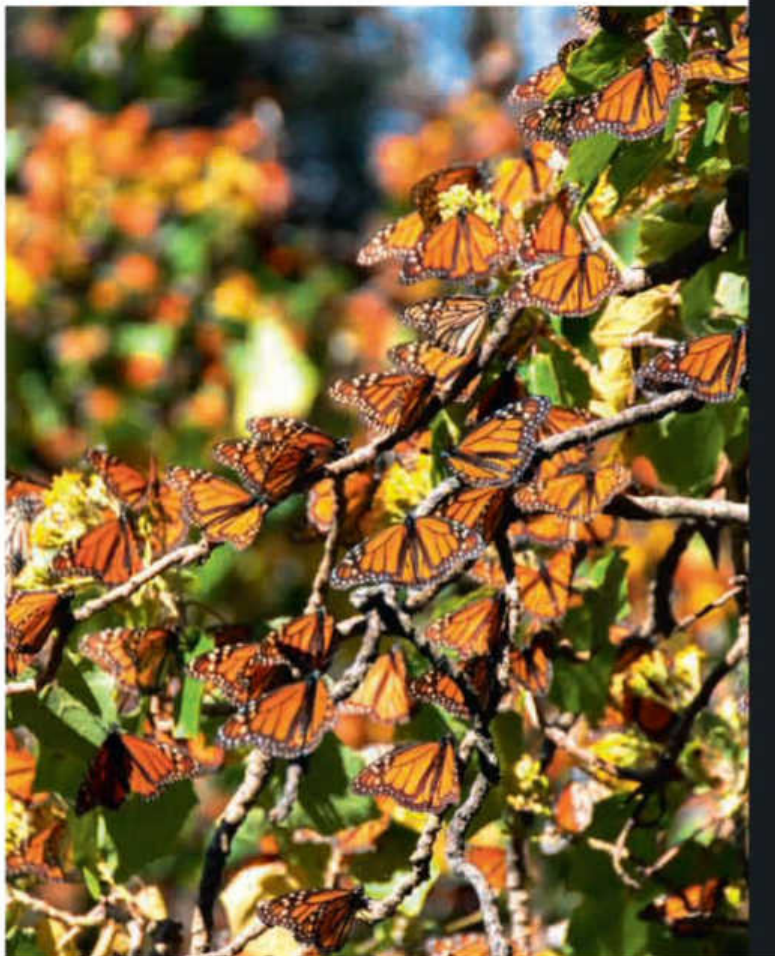


## ◀ Michoacán, Mexico

For... **A BEVY OF BUTTERFLIES**

What's that theory? When a butterfly flaps its wings on one side of the planet, it can cause a hurricane on the other? Then goodness knows what effect the 150 million-odd monarchs that migrate between Canada and Mexico each year must have. Right now, the squadrons of orange-black butterflies are gathered in the Santuario Mariposa Monarca in Mexico's Michoacán state, where they've been resting since about October following their mammoth odyssey.

But it's in February – when the weather begins to warm – that they start to get the fidgets, stirring from their winter torpor, readying for the journey back north in March. In the cool of early morning they cloak the trees like a vast ginger toupee; as the day's heat increases they fill the skies with colour and noise; the afternoon humidity sends them down onto the forest floor, like a carpet of autumn leaves, with extra flutter.



## Ladakh, India

For... **MATING SNOW LEOPARD**

These mountain-dwelling big cats are famously elusive. However, the best chance to spot one is during their winter mating season, from October to March, when they creep down to lower altitudes in places such as Ladakh's Hemis Valley. And, according to the Snow Leopard Conservancy, 14 February – Valentine's Day – is just about peak mating season.

## Transylvania, Romania

For... **WILD WOLVES**

Transylvania is home to Europe's largest population of wolves. And, in winter, these tough-to-find creatures become a little easier to spot. Local shepherds and researchers can lead groups into the Carpathians, following tracks in the snow – at this time, most domestic livestock has left the alpine meadows, so footprints belong are almost guaranteed to belong to wild animals; look out for lynx too.

## Donsol, Philippines

For... **WHALE SHARKS**

The whale sharks that migrate to Donsol each December-May are a convenient bunch, finning well into the shallow bay, in numbers, and thus making themselves easy to swim with. Numbers peak February-March; February also happens to be one of the best months weatherwise in the Philippines too, largely cool and dry.

## Baja California, Mexico

For... **FRIENDLY GRAY WHALES**

The Pacific's gray whales make one of the animal kingdom's longest migrations, travelling from the Arctic to reach San Ignacio Lagoon to mate and calve. Perhaps that's why they seem so happy, at journeys end? Notoriously friendly, the grays here will bump up against boats and seek out human contact. They are here from February to April, with numbers higher in February, though more extrovert behaviour usually displayed later in the season. Fin, sperm and Bryde's whales can also be spotted.



**ALSO TRY:** Hokkaido, Japan – Steller's sea eagles • Dominican Republic – humpbacks • Sweden – wolves



# March



## India

### For... TEMPERATE TIGERS

Technically it's recently become easier to see tigers in *any* month: at the beginning of 2015, India's National Tiger Conservation Authority announced a 30% increase in numbers, up to 2,226. But to maximise the chances of a sighting, visit one of the country's big cat reserves in March-April. At this time, India's temperatures are still tolerable, yet much of the jungle vegetation has died back, making the animals easier to find; as the heat continues to rise, tigers are increasingly drawn to dwindling water sources – indeed, July would be a great month for spotting, if you could bear days above 40°C.

Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, in Madhya Pradesh, is a good destination choice – it has a healthy tiger population, plus chances to see leopard, wild boar, sloth and rhesus monkeys. Pench Reserve (believed to have inspired Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*) and the open grasslands of Kanha are good options too (both in Madhya Pradesh), as is Rajasthan's Ranthambhore.

## California, USA

### For... SEA OTTERS WITH PUPS

Make for Monterey to see mother sea otters nursing their young, which are born from January to March; you might also spot the mammals floating on their backs, using rocks as tools to crack open their shellfish lunch. From mid-December to mid-April, gray whales pass by the coast too.

## Azores, Portugal

### For... PASSING BLUE WHALES

The Azores are excellent for marine sightings year-round, with resident sperm whales and dolphins often spotted – frequently from the shore. But migratory blues – as well as fins and seis – swim by from March to early June, increasing the Atlantic archipelago's wild appeal.

## Torres del Paine, Chile

### For... POSSIBLE PUMA

The big cats of Patagonia are most active from February to April, when mums are scouting for food for their young. A ruling in April 2015 banned offroading safaris in Torres del Paine National Park, which will make finding the puma a whole lot harder. Consider dipping into the adjacent private Reserva Pumas del Paine instead.

## Qinling, China

### For... WILD PANDAS

To reliably see a panda, head to the Research Centre in Chengdu. To hopefully see a wild panda, trek into the bamboo thickets of the Qinling Mountains in March-April, and keep your fingers crossed. This is the best time to track the bears, when the foliage isn't so dense and the animals have wandered down to the lower, more accessible slopes to mate and feed. ►



**ALSO TRY:** Kalahari, Botswana – big game • Norfolk, UK – common cranes • Trinidad & Tobago – turtles



# April



## Southern Sri Lanka

For... **BLUE WHALES & LEOPARDS**

April is the month for a double whammy. It's the end of the dry season, so the leopards (and other critters) of Yala National Park conveniently congregate by the remaining waterholes. And there's just time to still spot the mighty blue whales, which gather off Dondra Head from January to April.

## Danube Delta, Romania

For... **BIRDS IN ABUNDANCE**

Between April and October it seems just about any bird migrating in the vague vicinity stops off at this expansive wetland. Species seen in big numbers include white pelican (3,500 breeding pairs), ferruginous ducks, small egrets and more than 30% of the European population of glossy ibis.

## Ningaloo, Australia

For... **WHALE SHARKS**

A coral spawn draws large numbers of the world's biggest fish to this reef off Western Australia each April-July. Indeed, the water's full of all sorts right now, from dolphins and dugongs to turtles and manta rays. Spotter planes, boat trips and snorkels help you find and get close to the action.

## Valdés, Argentina

For... **BEACHING ORCA**

February to April sees peak sea lion pup numbers on the beaches of the Valdés Peninsula, which encourages the resident orca to employ rather dramatic hunting techniques, flinging themselves shorewards, right into the shallows, in the hope of a tender snack. This behaviour is unpredictable, though high tides increase the chances of an attack.



## Galápagos, Ecuador

For... **WAVED ALBATROSS (AND MORE)**

There is never a really bad time to go to the Galápagos – each month on the isolated Pacific archipelago has its wildlife highlights. But, weighing everything up, April might just be best. It's the end of the rainy season, meaning drier skies but greener islands; also, the sea is just about at its calmest, warmest and clearest – perfect for snorkelling with an array of creatures, from penguins to marine iguanas to playful sea lions.

April sees waved albatross arrive on Española to perform their elegant courtship joust (until June). Frigatebirds have inflated their balloon-like crimson throat pouches for mating; blue-footed boobies are mating too, dancing about on their turquoise feet. On the beaches, sea turtles are hauling ashore to lay their eggs. Downsides? The waters are emptier of larger species – June-September is better for migrating humpbacks and whale sharks. And December-March is the time to watch baby giant tortoises hatch.



**ALSO TRY:** Sasan-Gir NP, India – Asiatic lions • Belize – whale sharks • Southern Portugal – migratory birds



# May



## Danum Valley, Borneo

**For... PRIMATES IN THE DRY**

Borneo oozes 'wildness' in its very syllables. There's a wealth of species to be seen here, and the dry season – roughly March to October – is the best time to look, with May a particular goodie. The north-eastern state of Sabah tends to get least rain this month, and trekking conditions are at their most comfortable (with average daily temperatures of around 29°C). Perfect, then, for delving into the Danum Valley, a designated conservation area of outstanding biodiversity.

There is a glut of fruit on the trees here this month, which helps to attract a wealth of primates, including gibbons, macaques, red-leaf monkeys and orang utans – Danum has the world's highest concentration of the 'old men of the forest'. Elephants, barking deer, mouse deer, wild boar and the rare clouded leopard and Sumatran rhino stomp here too. Also, as a bonus, the whale sharks that arrive off the Sabah coast in March are still swimming by.



## Skomer, Wales

**For... PLENTY OF PUFFINS**

The island off Pembrokeshire is open to visitors from April to September. Puffins arrive in March/April and begin building nests and laying eggs in spring, before the chicks begin to fledge come July. There are plenty of other seabirds too: razorbills, guillemots and Manx shearwaters.

## Eastern Cape, South Africa

**For... SARDINES & SEA CREATURES**

From May to July millions of sardines cut a silvery dash past the east coast of South Africa, bound for the Indian Ocean – that is, if the chasing phalanx of gannets, albatross, dolphins, Cape fur seals, orca and copper sharks doesn't get them first. It is a marine frenzy, viewable by boat or (for the brave) by diving in.

## Abruzzo, Italy

**For... HUNGRY BEARS**

The endangered Marsican brown bears of central Italy's Apennine Mountains have just woken from their hibernation – and they're hungry, and busy themselves foraging for fruits, roots and berries. This flush of activity makes a sighting more likely, against a backdrop of blooming wildflowers.

## Komodo, Indonesia

**For... MARAUDING DRAGONS**

It's more comfortable to visit this dragons' lair in the Indonesian dry season (May-October); also, after their eggs hatch in April, Komodo's prehistoric-looking lizards become more active from May onwards. ►



**ALSO TRY:** Husavík, Iceland – whales & orca • Camargue, France – flamingos & birds • Canada – brown bears



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# June



## ◀ Volcanoes NP, Rwanda

### For... GORILLA ENCOUNTERS

Tracking Rwanda's rare mountain gorillas is not cheap – permits for a not-even-guaranteed only-one-hour-long encounter cost US\$750. So, if you're going to pay all that cash (and it really is worth it), you might as well make the experience as comfortable as possible. Head to Rwanda during the longer dry season – June-September – when temperatures are cooler, the air less humid and the chances of rain are at their lowest (though you can get a downpour at any time). The jungly trails will be less slippery too, making the hike a less arduous prospect.

Visit in early June and you'll overlap with the best chimpanzee tracking time: locating chimps in Rwanda's Nyungwe Forest National Park is tougher in the dry season as, with food harder to find, the apes venture deeper into the forest; in early June, they haven't yet ventured too far.

## Papua New Guinea

### For... BIRDS OF PARADISE

It can rain just about any time in the lushly abundant jungle of Papua New Guinea. However, the middle months of the dry season – June-September – are probably the best bet; the temperature is a little cooler, and it's still breeding season for the raggiana bird of paradise, PNG's national bird. You can combine your birdwatching with one of the country's colourful festivals too.

## Hudson Bay, Canada

### For... BIRTHING BELUGA

From mid-June, once the pack ice has broken up, thousands of these smiley white whales start to congregate in the Churchill River, off Hudson Bay. They sing, click, play and give birth, before heading off again in August. Boat, kayak and snorkel trips allow extremely close encounters.

## Great Barrier Reef, Australia

### For... MINKE WHALES & CALM SEAS

Queensland's dry season (June-November) equals calmer and clearer seas – all the better for exploring the wealth of marine life that inhabits the Great Barrier Reef. As a bonus, dwarf minke whales (recognised as a distinct species in the 1980s) are most often seen around the northern Agincourt Ribbon Reefs from June to August.

## Iceland

### For... SEABIRDS & WHALES

June is lively in Iceland. Seabirds have arrived in full force – around a million at Látrabjarg, including puffins, razorbills and fulmars. They start nesting in May, peak in June and fizzle out in July. But it's also a great time for whales, with blues often joining the humpbacks and minkes off Husavik in June and early July. Plus, its high-summer, so you have gloriously long days into which to cram hours of spotting. ▶



**ALSO TRY:** Kaikoura, New Zealand – migratory whales • Isle of Man, UK – basking sharks • Majete, Malawi – black rhino



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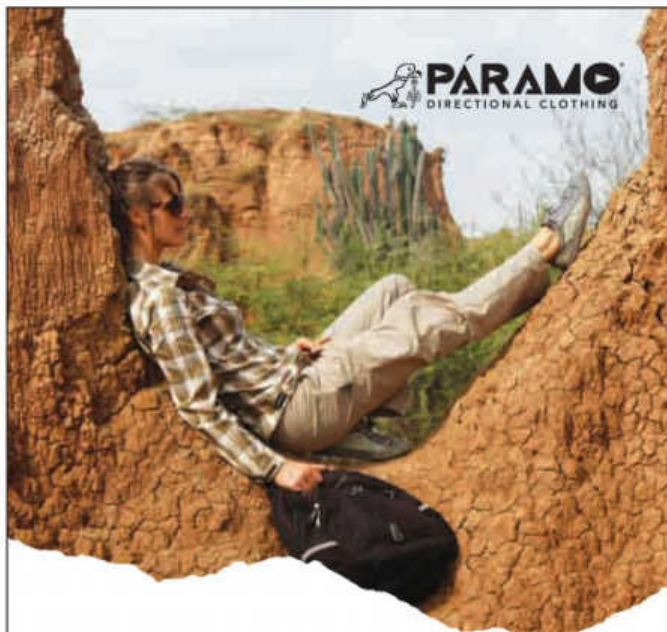
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# July



## ◀ Katmai, Alaska

### For... **FISHING BEARS**

Around 2,200 brown bears live in Katmai National Park. And during the summer months, all they're thinking about is fattening up for winter. There's plenty of food on offer – from sedge grass to sand clams – and bears seem to favour different sources at different times in different locations.

July and September are the best months to be at Brooks Camp, to spy a bevy of bears standing mid-river, fishing for the sockeye salmon; in some years, nearly 100 individual bears have been spotted along a 2.4km stretch of the Brooks River. In June, they are more likely to be digging shellfish out of the sand at Hallo Bay or grazing on grasses by Swikshak Lagoon. In August see more salmon-snatching at Geographic Harbour or Moraine Creek. This is Alaska at its warmest too.



## Okavango Delta, Botswana

### For... **A BIT OF EVERYTHING**

Floodwaters reach their peak in June, bringing a burst of new life to the Okavango Delta. The waters also fill up dry channels, increasing canoeing possibilities – you can paddle between a flourish of reeds, water lilies, dragonflies and kingfishers as well as chuckling hippos. By July the skies are dry, and from now until October is the ideal time to spot game coming down to drink.

## East Finland

### For... **WILD BEARS**

Watch brown bears under the midnight sun in Finland's wild east. The longer days buy you more hours to see (and snap) the bears from good wildlife hides – try Martinselkonen. By July and August, fattening up is the bears' main concern again, so feeding station sightings are good. From late June, the first mothers with cubs tend to come for a forage too.

## Svalbard

### For... **POLAR BEARS BY BOAT**

There's a narrow window of opportunity for getting up-close to the Arctic's polar bears here. Until the sea ice melts (in June/July), expedition cruises can't access Svalbard's northern and eastern coastlines, where bears are most likely to be seen, hunting on the floes. And with the midnight sun (lasting until 23 August), you can scout for wildlife until the wee hours.

## Western Cape, South Africa

### For... **BREACHING GREAT WHITE SHARKS**

Between Dyer Island and Geyser Rock lies Shark Alley, where the resident 60,000-strong colony of Cape fur seals provides a feast for great white sharks – especially from May to August, when new-born seal pups make easy pickings. July-August is the best time to see the sharks breach: a fearsome hulk of muscle and teeth, bursting clear out of the blue. ▶



**ALSO TRY:** Wrangel Island, Russia – walrus • North Cyprus – turtles • Québec, Canada – blue whales



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# August



## Arizona, USA

### For... HIGH NUMBERS OF HUMMINGBIRDS

The skies of Arizona are buzzed by a delightful flurry of hummingbirds year-round. However, migrants add to the resident population from spring to autumn, with numbers peaking in August. You can see 15 different species here, from rufous and magnificent to blue-throated and broad-tailed; rarer Allen's and plain-capped starthroats are most likely July-August.

## Johnstone Strait, BC, Canada

### For... ORCA SPOTTING

From mid-July to mid-September, pods of peckish orca – numbering around 200 – patrol this small channel off the north of Vancouver Island to feast on the summer glut of salmon. Some companies offering trips into the Johnstone Strait boast a 95% success rate for sightings during this period, with tours often delivering humpbacks, porpoises, dolphins, sea lions, seals and bald eagles too.

## Tortuguero, Costa Rica

### For... NESTING TURTLES

Tortuguero means 'region of turtles', so it's no surprise to find a load of them in this national park on Costa Rica's northern Caribbean coast. Green and hawksbill turtles nest along the beaches from July to October, peaking in August. July is one of the region's wettest months, September one of the driest – but as it can rain at any time, best not to worry too much about the weather.

## Minneriya, Sri Lanka

### For... LOTS OF ELEPHANTS

The grasslands of central Sri Lanka's Minneriya National Park are home to one of the world's largest gatherings of Asian elephants. The animals congregate here for dry-season grazing from July to October (with numbers generally peaking in August); herds in the hundreds can sometimes be spotted. Deer, monkeys and waterbirds also join the party. ►



## ◀ Mara River, Kenya/Tanzania

### For... THE GREAT MIGRATION

The million-odd wildebeest (and attendant zebra and gazelle) of the East African Great Migration aren't 100% predictable. But by June this troop of ungulates has generally finished its rutting and reached the Serengeti's Grumeti River – the first watercourse to traverse, and a precursor to the gauntlet-run that awaits further north...

By July the herds have usually reached the Mara River, with the splashing, frenetic, desperate crossings here peaking in August and into September. Watch in horror and fascination as hundreds and thousands of wildebeest amass on the banks before taking the plunge together, while an ambush of hungry crocs and lions looks on, hoping to pick off an easy meal. The downside: it can be almost as busy with humans as animals, as safari-goers flock to see the gruesome spectacle.

Pick a lodge in a private conservancy – rather than the Mara itself – for a trip with a more intimate feel (and the possibility of walking safaris). Also consider travel in much quieter (and cheaper) October-November – in recent years, this period has delivered some of the best sightings.

**ALSO TRY:** Costa Rica – hammerheads • Bay of Fundy, Canada – whales • Uganda – gorillas



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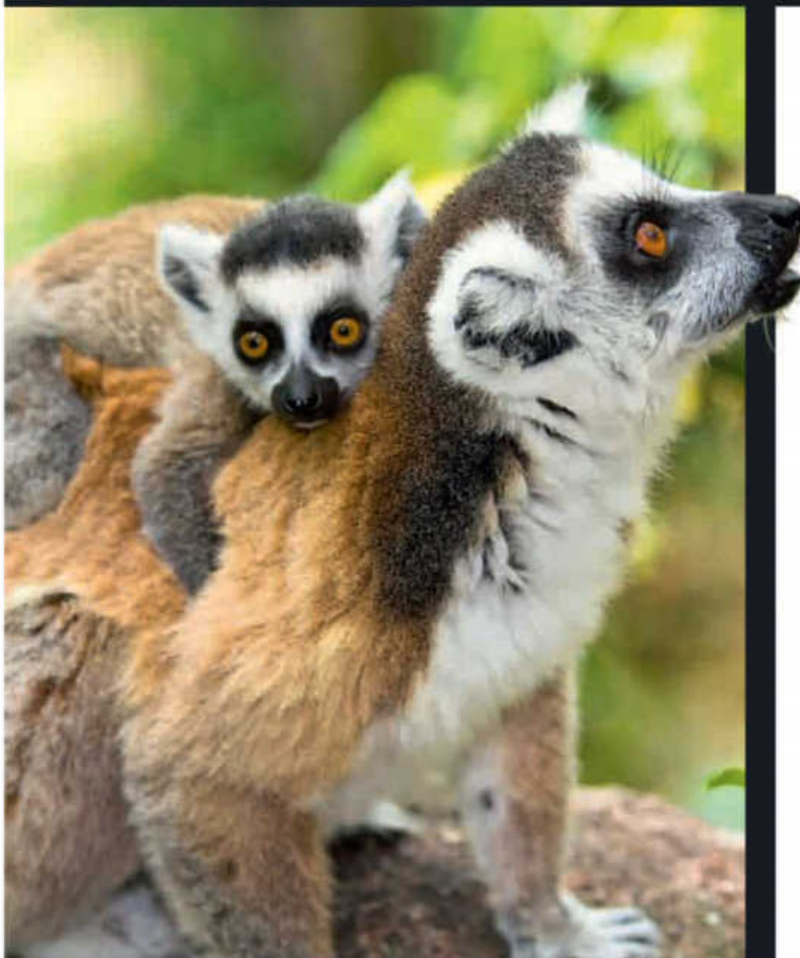
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# September



## ◀ Madagascar

### For... **BABY LEMURS**

September is a magnificent month to visit Madagascar. It's still dry season (April-October), which makes exploring more comfortable. It's not too hot yet (averages of around 23°C) – ideal for making the most of the splendid beaches, and stirring the wildlife from chill-induced inactivity. Also, the holiday peak of July-August has passed, leaving the island even less crowded.

But, mainly, it's excellent for wildlife. Lemurs are present year-round, but in September-October many of these endemic primates – including the handsome ring-taileds – are giving birth to babies; you might see youngsters clinging to their mums' backs, or making their first brave solo forays.

September is peak bird breeding season too, a good time to see a wealth of colourful endemics. There's also just time to see the humpbacks off Île Sainte Maire – the whales pass by, en route to Antarctica, from July to September.

## Chobe, Botswana

### For... **ELEPHANTS EN MASSE**

At the arid end of the dry season – September and October – the wealth of wildlife roaming Chobe National Park is forced down to the riverbank to drink. This includes many of the park's 120,000 elephants, not to mention plenty of prey animals, which attract plenty of predators in turn.

## Gombe Stream, Tanzania

### For... **TRACKING CHIMPANZEES**

You *can* track chimpanzees here at any time of year, but it's a whole lot easier in the dry season (June-October), particularly towards the end of it. The vegetation is less dense, the trails less slippery and the charismatic primates tend to stay on the lower slopes.

## Swaziland

### For... **RHINOS & COUNTRY COMBOS**

Swaziland is a rhino hotspot, offering some of Africa's best opportunities to get close to these endangered animals. You can spot them here year-round (though the April-October dry season is comfier); however, what makes September an especially good choice is that it's prime time for a visit to South Africa's nearby Kruger National Park too – a tantalising wildlife double bill.

## Great Bear Rainforest, Canada

### For... **SPIRIT BEARS**

Chances are few to see this ghostly apparition of the Great Bear Rainforest. For most of the year they are either hibernating or hiding in the vast, dark, impenetrable expanse of the wilderness, impossible to track. However, for three precious weeks each autumn, the GBR's few hundred spirit bears – a rare colour variant of the black bear – come down to the rivers and streams, which are briefly teeming with salmon. Head for Princess Royal or Gribbell Islands to try to catch a glimpse. ►



**ALSO TRY:** Tonga – humpbacks • Cape Coast, South Africa – southern right whales • Ordesa NP, Spain – bearded vultures



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# October



## Highlands, Scotland

### For... RUTTING DEER

The iconic red deer stags of the Scottish Highlands are at their most rambunctious and pugilistic right now. Late September to early October is rutting time, when the males fight it out for control of the harems, clashing antlers and roaring into the morning mist.

## Ras Al-Jinz, Oman

### For... NESTING TURTLES

Set on the easternmost point of the Arabian Peninsula, the turtle reserve at Ras Al-Jinz is an important nesting site for green turtles – some 20,000 females return here each year. It is open year-round; however, the best time to come is August-November, the peak period of nesting activity. Waiting until October will reward with less intense temperatures too.

## Damaraland, Namibia

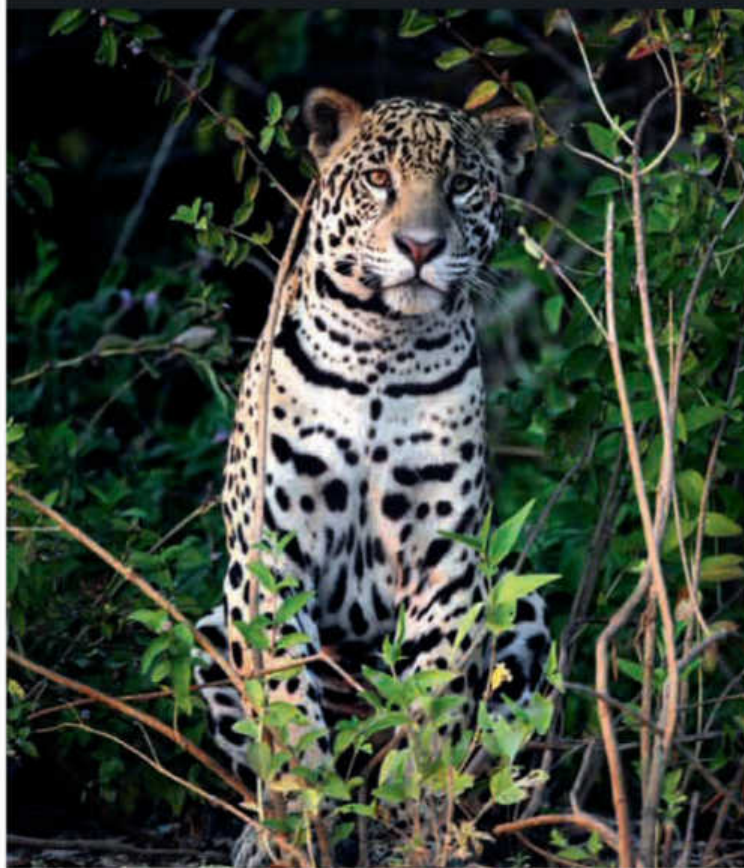
### For... DESERT ELEPHANT

The desert-adapted elephants of Namibia's northern Damaraland can be tricky to find – they easily disappear among this vastness of purple-red inselbergs. But during the dry season (June-October) they are less elusive, as the animals concentrate at river systems and springs.

## South Luangwa, Zambia

### For... WALKING SAFARIS

It's hot and dry in Zambia come September-October but consequently this is when game concentrations are at their height. It's the best time for walking safaris, with the skies blazing blue and little foliage to block the view; it's also your last chance of the year, as many camps close with the onset of the November rains. ►



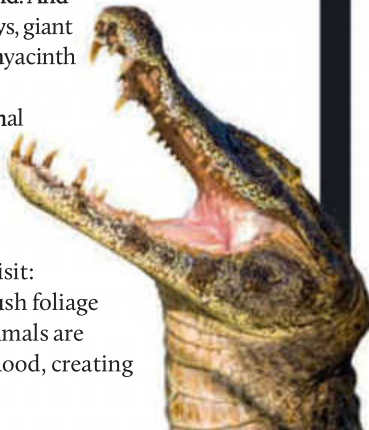
## ◀ Pantanal, Brazil

### For... EVERYTHING

The best, and most practical, time to explore the enormous Pantanal is during the drier May-November period. And as July-August tend to be the busiest months, opt for September-October, to see wildlife crowds rather than human ones. Creature-spotting is better at this time. Animals gather at shrinking areas of water, and the foliage is a little less dense, so everything is easier to find. And there's a lot of it: giant otters, howler monkeys, giant anteaters, capybara, caiman, tapir, toucans, hyacinth macaws and much, much more.

Not least of these is the jaguar – the Pantanal is the world's best place to spot these often elusive cats; spend a week making forays from Porto Jofre between July and October and your odds of seeing one are high.

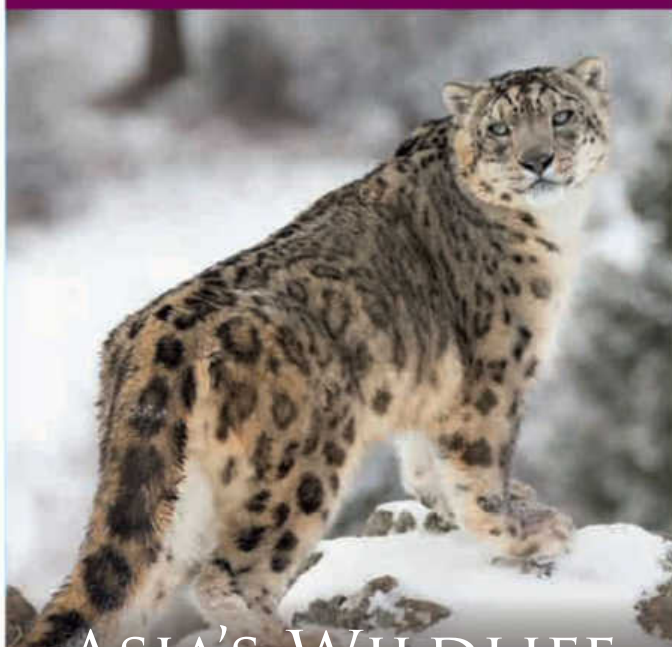
Just to make the case for a rainy season visit: getting around is much tougher, and the lush foliage can make visibility poor, but the land mammals are forced onto 'islands' amid the rampaging flood, creating dense little pockets of animal activity.



**ALSO TRY:** Hortobagy, Hungary – common cranes • Rocky Mountain NP, Canada – bugling elk • East Coast Australia – humpbacks



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# November

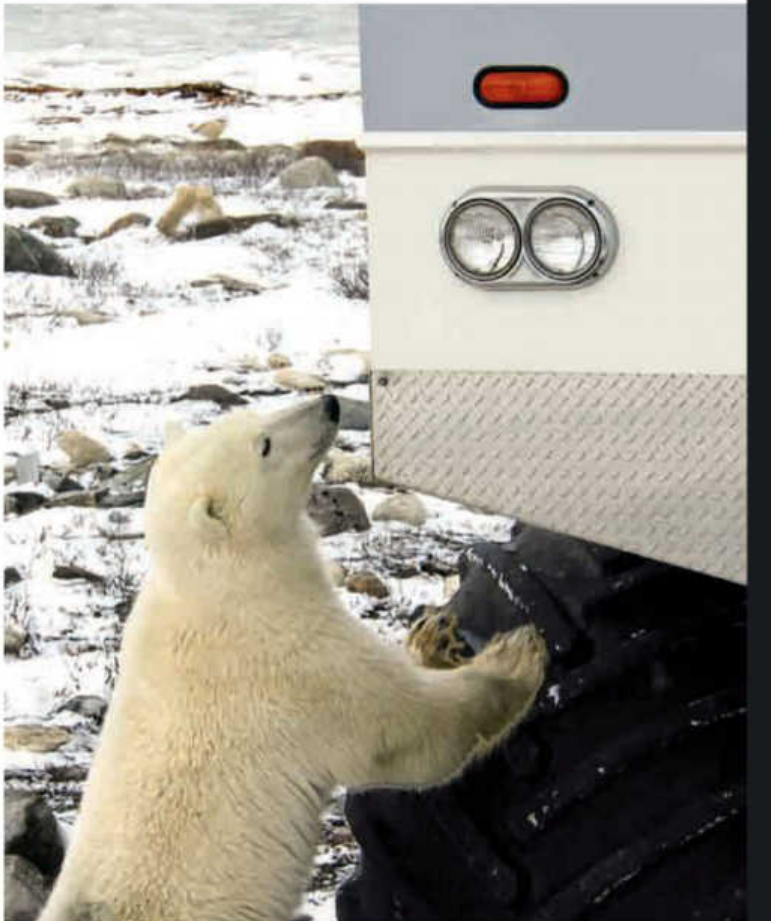


## ◀ Churchill, Canada

### For... POLAR BEARS BY BUGGY

They don't call Churchill the 'Polar Bear Capital of the World' for nothing. And although bears can also be seen around the remote Manitoba town in other seasons, they are best seen in autumn, when they're on the move from their summer home on the tundra to their winter hangout on the Hudson Bay pack ice (a good place for hunting seals). It's not hot – expect average temperatures below freezing. But being a bit cold is a small price to pay for such close-ups with these awesome ursines.

The reason you get so near is that the viewing is done from safe, fat-wheeled tundra buggies, which don't seem to bother the bears – it's not uncommon for them to walk right over, rear up on their hind legs and take a closer look at *you*. There are also opportunities for spine-tingling walking safaris – in the company of extremely expert guides. Look out for caribou, Arctic fox, Arctic hare, moose, snowy owls and ptarmigan too.



## Hokkaido, Japan

### For... DANCING RED-CROWNED CRANES

The Japanese believe cranes bring good luck, which is perhaps why they look after them so well. From November to March, feeding stations are set up at the Kushiro marshlands (their winter retreat), which make these elegant birds easier to see. Look out for them performing their elaborate mating dance against the snow.

## Falklands

### For... ELEPHANT SEAL ANTICS

As the austral summer starts, the creatures of the Falkland Islands get lively. Elephant seals start fighting from mid-October (and keep at it until the end of the year), while the pups are at their cutest in November. November-February is also best for spotting orca off the Sea Lion Islands, and – of course – there are plenty of penguins around too.

## South Georgia

### For... PLENTIFUL PENGUINS

There are few better places for penguins than this South Atlantic isle. Expedition ships start passing by from October/November, ideal timing to see penguin chicks starting to hatch, as well as landscapes streaked with wildflowers. The albatross have also arrived, and fur seals are starting to pup. Indeed, from now until February, it's a riot of wildlife wonders.

## Kasanka, Zambia

### For... FRUIT BAT FLURRIES

It's wet season in Zambia but it's worth putting up with occasional showers to view around eight million fruit bats in flight. The bats usually arrive in Kasanka by mid-October and stay until Christmas, to gorge on the ripe fruit trees. All day, they hang out on the branches. But, at dusk, they take flight as one, turning the sky a noisy black; after a night spent foraging, they return in the morning, a vast, dark cloud enveloping the land. ►



**ALSO TRY:** Bale Mountains, Ethiopia – wolves • Somerset, UK – starling murmurations • Alps, Austria – chamois



# December

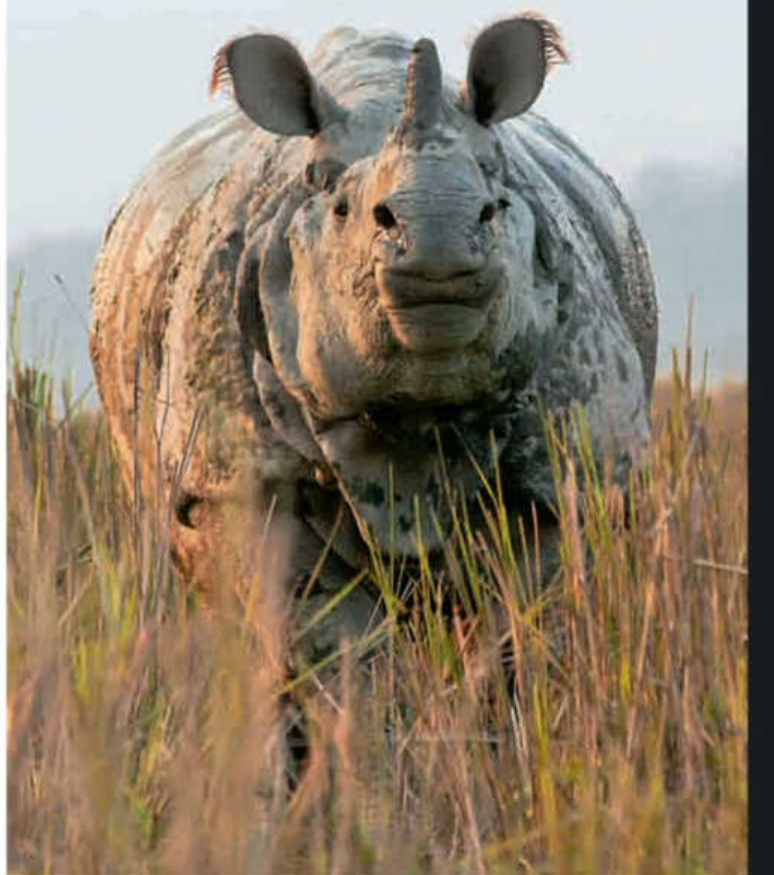
## ◀ Kaziranga, India

### For... THRIVING RHINO

Ensconced on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River, in the Indian state of Assam, Kaziranga National Park is home to 70% of the world's one-horned rhino. It's a handsome spot too, a spread of lush-green grassland swaying before a backdrop of distant Himalayan peaks. The park is open from October to April; floodwaters recede from mid-November making the place more accessible. But the best time to visit is from December onwards, after the annual grass burnings deplete the vegetation and make the wildlife a lot easier to see.

December is also delightfully mild, if quite cool at night.

Wildlife watching is done by 4WD or on elephant-back, usually in the early morning. As well as those one-horneds, species spotted might include Asian elephants, water buffalo, Ganges river dolphins, sambar deer and an array of birds. The park is also home to a good number of tigers, though they have a tendency to hide in the grass. Keep your eyes peeled.



## Laguna Colorada, Bolivia

### For... HIGH-ALTITUDE FLAMINGOS

December-April might be wet season in Bolivia but the rain brings more birds. It is during this period that the greatest numbers of flamingos can be seen on the high-altitude lakes of Reserva Eduardo Avaroa:

three species (James's, Chilean and Andean) favour the algae-rich waters here, and look particularly splendid against the crimson sheen of Laguna Colorada. As an aside, this is also the time to see the surreal white saltflat of the Salar de Uyuni under a fabulously photogenic puddle.

## Otago, New Zealand

### For... ALBATROSS CHICKS

The Otago Peninsula, on New Zealand's South Island, is home to the world's only mainland albatross colony, and birds are present year-round. However, the best time to visit – which handily coincides with NZ's best weather – is December to February, when the albatross are feeding their young: one parent is always guarding the nest, while the other heads off in search of food.

## Chitwan National Park, Nepal

### For... RHINOS & TIGERS

The dry season months of December and January are the best time to head into Royal Chitwan – on elephant back, by boat or on foot – with the thinner vegetation makes it easier to glimpse species such as rhinos and tigers; many Himalayan birds over-winter on the lowlands too. And thanks to clear, crisp skies, marvellous mountain views are the icing on the cake.

## Florida, USA

### For... AFFECTIONATE MANATEES

West Indian manatees don't like the cold, so congregate in the warm waters of Crystal River from December to the end of March. And they're so much sweeter than the nickname 'sea cow' suggests – curious and affectionate, playfully bumping into each other and any be-snorkelled human who happens to be finning by. 🐢



**ALSO TRY:** California, USA – elephant seals • Phobjikha Valley, Bhutan – black-necked cranes • New Mexico, USA – snow geese



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# TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

Become an instant expert  
with our travel know-how

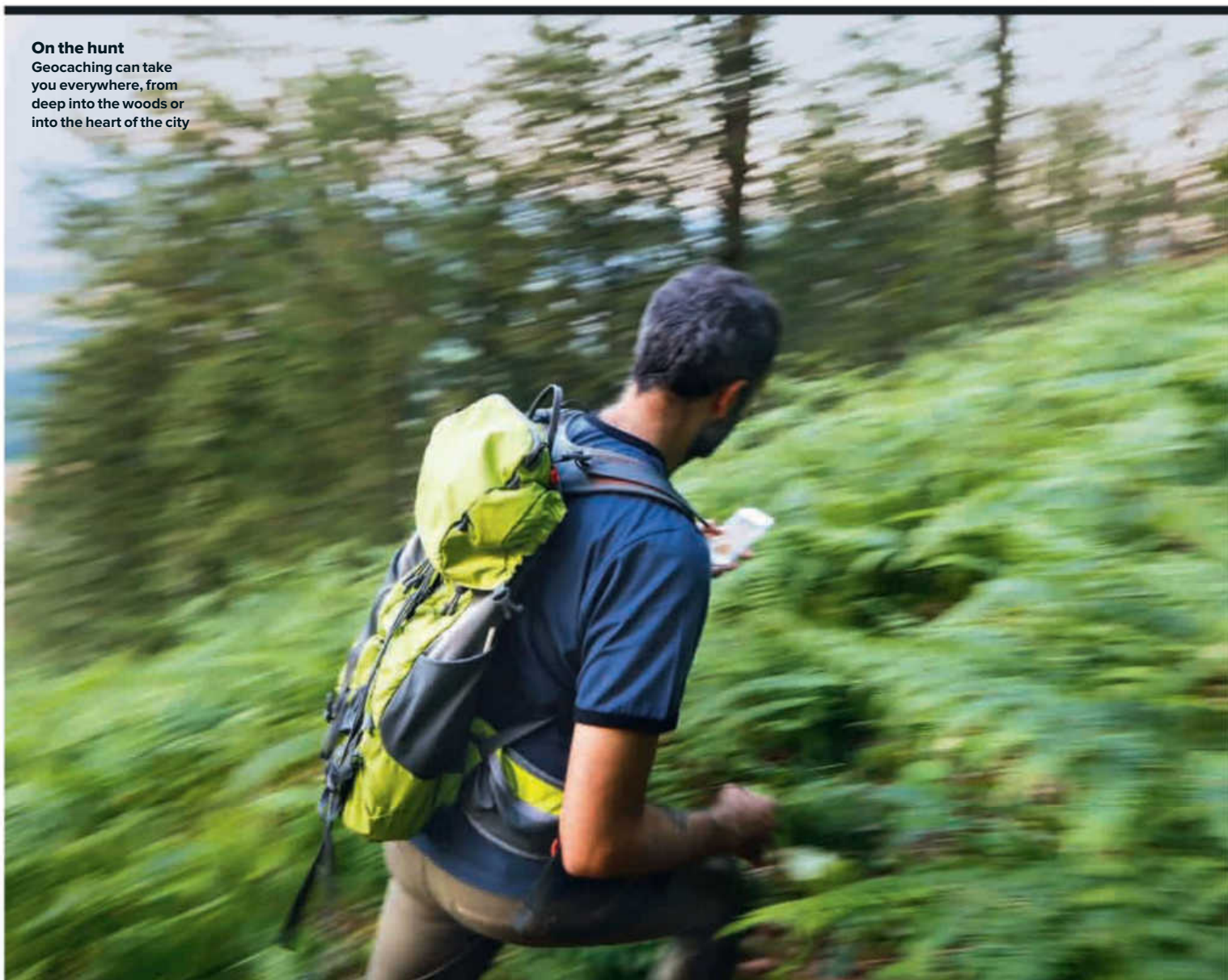


New  
Orleans –  
10 years  
after  
Katrina  
see p70

■ **This month's experts include:** Geocaching's go-to girl Christy Weckner, p60 ♦  
Urban birder David Lindo, p62 ♦ Dramatic scenery snapper Keith Partridge, p64 ♦  
Health hero Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p66 ♦ Tent titan Phoebe Smith, p73 ♦



**On the hunt**  
Geocaching can take you everywhere, from deep into the woods or into the heart of the city



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

# Get into geocaching

**T**here's a hi-tech global treasure hunt happening – right now. It's called geocaching: an activity that sees people scour nooks and crannies across the globe for containers of various shapes and sizes. There could be one hiding only a stone's throw away from you, this very moment. Or at the destination of your next trip. So, how can you join the hunt? Read on...

## Why do it?

Anyone can take up geocaching for a multitude of reasons. Some use it as a tool to get outdoors once they retire; others

fancy a new challenge on their travels. Geocaching can be an excuse to exercise or a family challenge that parents and children can do together. But ultimately, geocaching taps into our inherently inquisitive natures.

"Geocaching gives people a reason to explore the world around them," explains Christy Weckner, from community website geocaching.com. "There's something in our DNA that drives us to see what's around the next corner or over the next hill."

## What is a geocache?

Traditionally, geocaches usually come as different sizes of tupperware boxes or metal

army boxes. But as the game has developed, geocaches can come in any size, material or shape – a tiny thimble-sized magnetic container or larger ones the size of suitcases.

They may not even look like a regular container. People have become more creative with their hides, with some disguised as fir cones, dummy birds or contraptions that require special tools or a mental test. "There's always a new challenge," says Kate Horne, from the National Trust.

Once you reach a geocache, sign and date its logbook. There will be a number of quirky items there for you to swap for something of your own. The items are often worthless – like



## 'We embarked on a 6-state, 12-day geocaching adventure that included unforgettable outdoor experiences in the Rocky Mountains, Arches National Park and the Black Canyon'

bouncy balls, pens or loose change – and it's not essential to swap something every time.

But whether you're doing it on your own or as part of a group, don't get caught. You shouldn't be spotted by 'muggles' (non-geocachers) as players want to keep the activity a secret, so be as discreet as you can.

### How do you do it?

You can start straight away. The popular way is to download the Geocaching app onto your smartphone; this lists all the containers close to you and includes a built-in compass and map, and some handy hints too. You will likely discover that there's a geocache close by, providing an ideal, immediate opportunity to develop your scavenging skills.

No smartphone? A GPS device will help you track down those containers. However, if you haven't used a GPS before, it might take you a bit longer to use it confidently – you'll have to plug in the co-ordinates yourself.

### Where do they hide?

There are more than 2.6 million Geocaches spread across 180 countries; there are even a handful in Antarctica and one on the International Space Station! In the early stages of the concept, 15 years ago, geocaches were tucked in relatively simple places. Over time, though, this has changed drastically.

"The game has evolved to include caches placed in busy parts of large cities, in neighbourhood parks, or in waterways only accessible by kayak or canoe," explains Brian Hayes, an experienced geocacher who has found over 10,000 caches.

"Geocaches often take people to beautiful, fascinating places that they would not have found otherwise," adds Christy.

### Can I do one while abroad?

Yes. "If people catch the geocaching bug, they can continue their adventures while on their travels," says Kate.

Brian Hayes took this idea one stage further: "For my honeymoon with my wife, we embarked on a 6-state, 12-day geocaching adventure that included unforgettable

outdoor experiences in the Rocky Mountains, Arches National Park and the Black Canyon."

It's becoming easier to geocache abroad, adds Christy, as translations of the container descriptions or instructions are now available in 23 languages. But before you head off to a foreign site, look at the online logs (notes left by previous finders) to confirm the geocache is still there. If you're thinking of searching for several on one trip, plot a route between them, incorporating local sights along the way.

Take extra care when hunting in busy areas, especially in places where you don't speak the language – your innocent pastime could turn into a sticky situation if you look like you're doing something you shouldn't be, and can't explain your way out of it.

### Can I hide one myself?

Once you feel you've found enough caches to know how the game works (it is recommended to find at least 20), you can start thinking about placing your own.

"Being a geocache owner is a commitment, but a fun one," says Christy. "Geocache owners are responsible for the ongoing maintenance of their geocache container but get to have the pleasure of seeing how many people come to visit it and share their stories in its logbook or online."

Before deciding on a location for your cache, think about its suitability. Is it protected from the natural elements? If it's on private land, you'll need to get the landowner's permission first. Organisations like the National Trust actively encourage geocaching, but still need to be told when one is placed on their land.

Remember, owning a geocache is not just about hiding it – you're in charge of fixing or replacing it if damaged and for supplying a fresh logbook if the one in the cache is full.

Whether you decide to set up a geocache or simply search for them, the hunt can add an extra dimension to your travels. So next time you're trekking the national parks of the United States, roaming Japan or visiting the Taj Mahal, look around – there could be a geocache close by.

### Case study

## RHODRI ANDREWS

Keen geocacher and *Wanderlust's* editorial assistant talks woodland hunts and 'caching across the planet



### How did you get into geocaching?

One of my friends invited me along after trying out a couple

himself; I had no idea what to expect. After finding a couple just a few hundred metres from my house I was hooked. I think I went out every day for the next fortnight, hunting for geocaches.

### Why do you do it?

I do it mainly because I love walking and this adds an extra dimension. When I have a whole day free I try to plan a series of geocaches as part of a long walk. It's even better when I do it with a group of friends – the social aspect of a forest walk combined with hunting for secret containers is great. Even when it's bitterly cold or we've been caught in heavy rain, I've always come away having enjoyed myself.

### How hard is it to do?

It's not hard at all. I just downloaded the app to my smartphone and away I went. With the first couple you find, you're always going to be a bit tentative and hypersensitive to those around you and what they're thinking. Obviously, the more caches you find, the quicker you'll become at sussing out the different ways they can be hidden, but there's always a few that present you with a challenge to keep you entertained!

### What about geocaching overseas?

I've found geocaches in Belgium, Germany and Canada and they've all been great. Definitely plan ahead and be prepared to return to busier, more-crowded spots when they're a little quieter. You probably have to be a little wiser when picking your moments to grab the cache too – you'll get strange looks if people spot you rustling in the bushes wherever you go, but if you can't overcome the language barrier abroad and you're carrying a mysterious box then it could take a while to dig yourself out of that one! 📦

### TOP TIP

If you're using your phone as your GPS device, it's worth investing in a portable battery as the app is energy-hungry. You don't want to find yourself in the middle of nowhere with a flat phone.



# ASK THE EXPERTS

The accessible Great Himalaya Trail; winter in Reykjavík; how to plan a big trip; birding on European short breaks; tackling the Thames – our experts put you in the know...

## THE EXPERTS



**ROBIN BOUSTEAD**

Author of *Nepal Trekking & the Great Himalaya Trail* (Trailblazer; trailblazer-guides.com)



**LAURA DIXON**

Author of *Reykjavik Focus Guide* (Footprint; footprinttravelguides.com)



**MATT PRIOR**

Founder of Matt Prior Adventure Academy (mpadventureacademy.com)



**DAVID LINDO**

Urban birder & author of *Tales from Concrete Jungles* (Bloomsbury; bloomsbury.com)

**Q** I love the sound of the Great Himalaya Trail but don't have time to walk all 4,500km! What are the best two/three-week-long sections?

**Dan Kuness, by email**

**A** The Great Himalaya Trail (thegreathimalayatrail.org) is an incredibly diverse network of mountain and village trails throughout the Himalaya. Choosing the trek that best suits you can be overwhelming.

A good choice is the Upper Dolpo region (trips 14-28 days). Mysterious and spectacular, Dolpo boasts some of the last genuine examples of semi-nomadic Tibetan culture. Make sure you include one the most beautiful places in Nepal, the stunning Phoksumdo Lake. You'll need a good operator to get here but the time and cost is more than worth it.

Or try Ganesh Himal (trips 10-14 days): combining cultural immersion with some spectacular mountain views, the Ruby Valley is full of wonderful places to visit and is easy to access from Kathmandu.

The route to the base camp of the fifth-highest peak on earth, Mt Makalu (8,485m), offers the ultimate mountain fix, with towering cliffs, hanging glaciers and unbridled wilderness. You can now access the region by air and road, and there are teahouses the whole way; trips take 14-21 days.

**Robin Boustead, author of Nepal Trekking and the Great Himalaya Trail (Trailblazer)**

**Q** I want to experience Reykjavík on a short break this winter – but which is the best month to go for a visit?

**S Atkinson, by email**

**A** November to February are the key months for northern lights watching – what could be better than sitting in a steaming hot tub in the cold air, watching nature's most stunning light display? Sightings are not guaranteed but most local tour operators provide a daily update on the weather conditions and likelihood of seeing the aurora, and offer a repeat trip if you are unlucky.

The major issue in winter is that there are fewer hours of daylight because the country is so far north. At its worst, you might only have four hours of daylight, so you can be limited with outdoor activities, which are also hampered by snow. Caving, the Into the Volcano trip, longer horseriding tours and travel to inland sights including the Landmannalaugar hot springs are typically off the itinerary.

Reykjavik itself has plenty going on. There is a winter lights festival and Thorraþlot, the midwinter food festival, in February – but for me, the pre-Christmas period is the best, giving you a chance to share in the Icelandic love of Christmas and their frankly barking traditions.

**Laura Dixon, author of Reykjavik (Footprint)**



**Kicking up dust**  
An overlander speeds past a large anthill in the Australian outback

**Q** I want to do a big expedition – like driving overland from UK to Oz – but don't have any experience of planning such a challenging trip. Where do I start?

**A McGregor, by email**

**A** It's all about the approach you take. The hardest part, no matter how clichéd it sounds, is putting the first step in motion. Once that is done, the ball is rolling and momentum will grow from there. For any big plan, you need to treat it like a project, break it down and make it manageable by using milestones. You will of course reach obstacles but you need to find a way to overcome them and not just use convenient excuses as a reason to just stop. This is all too common and the biggest threat to your plan – don't take the easy option and give up. Throughout the



**'Pursuing your curiosity will give you the best "big trip" experience. You'll need to be: creative, different, willing to network and resolute – never give up'**



Insiders' Guide to...

## WILDLIFE TRIPS



**Vicky Boughton**, senior product manager for wildlife encounters at Exodus Travels ([exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk)) suggests her top destinations...

**SPITSBERGEN:** A captivating land of peaks, glaciers, endless tundra and cobalt waters, this remote icy wilderness is a must. Kittiwakes, guillemots and little auks thrive at 80° north, while walrus can be found wallowing in the shallows. In the summer months, 24-hour daylight maximises the chances of seeing polar bears.

**EAST AFRICA:** Discover the vast plains and abundant wildlife of Kenya's Masai Mara, witness the Migration thundering through Tanzania's Serengeti or spend one precious hour with a family of mountain gorillas in Rwanda or Uganda. East Africa's safari credentials are renowned the world over – and with excellent reason.

**INDIA:** The Tadoba-Andhari Reserve is one of the emerging destinations for seeing tigers in the wild. Its rugged landscape has bamboo and teak forest, with serene lakes as the backdrop to game drives. There are good sightings of tiger (including cubs), leopard and sloth bears.

**GALÁPAGOS:** This extraordinary archipelago, with its stark lava fields, mangrove lagoons, volcanic craters, cactus forests and turquoise waters, left a lasting impression on Charles Darwin. The real beauty is the vast array of endemic wildlife; step over snoozing sea lions, watch the courting ritual of blue-footed boobies and snorkel with turtles, penguins, sharks and rays.



whole process remain as flexible as possible with contingencies built in allowing you to adapt along the way.

When on the adventure, smile, enjoy, go with the flow, but keep your wits about you. Zip ties, duct tape and some US dollars are always useful. Don't be a sheep, get off the beaten track and explore. Pursuing your curiosity will give you the best experience. In general, as with all these things, you need to be: creative, different, willing to network and resolute – never give up.

**Matt Prior, founder, Matt Prior Adventure Academy ([mpadventureacademy.com](http://mpadventureacademy.com))**

**Q** I love city breaks and I love birds. I'm planning a European short break for the autumn – where would you recommend?

**George Newton, by email**

**A** Europe is jam-packed with many great cities for birds – if you look up you'll be surprised at the sheer diversity of birdlife. The great thing about urban birding is that you can indulge your passion in just about any city. London has its Royal Parks, which are great for waterbirds and woodpeckers. In Paris you can watch crested tits in the Père Lachaise Cemetery, hawfinches in Madrid, flamingos in Lisbon, golden orioles in Budapest, long-eared owls in Belgrade and mighty goshawks in Berlin.

Remember, the key thing is to see each city as a bird would: the buildings are cliffs and any green areas are an oasis for resident birds. Also: airports offer some great opportunities for birding: I keep a mental list of the species that I have seen while taking off and landing.

The golden rule is just look up. You'll be amazed by what you see.

**David Lindo, urban birder & author of *Tales from Concrete Jungles* (Bloomsbury)**

**Q** I'm thinking of walking the Thames Path but I only have weekends. Which two-day stretches would you recommend?

**Brian Barker, by email**

**A** The Thames Path is mostly very well serviced by public transport, and as it follows the river, all sections can be easily walked by ramblers of average fitness. This opens up the opportunity for completing the trail over a number of weekends.

As a taster, a splendid stretch that is easily achievable over a weekend, and which encompasses many of the path's finest aspects, is that

between historic Wallingford and Henley-on-Thames. This thoroughly enjoyable 43.5km hike includes the oft-photographed splendour of Goring Gap, a flirtation with the Chiltern Hills and the magical village of Sonning, described by Jerome K Jerome in his comedic Thames-borne tale *Three Men in a Boat* as 'the most fairy-like little nook on the river'.

With an overnight stop at Pangbourne – the final resting place of Kenneth Grahame, the author of *Wind in the Willows* – you'll also pass through some of the river's prettiest villages and by some of its most magnificent locks. As I completed this stretch in the spring of 2014, red kites soared overhead and wildflowers adorned much of the footpath about my feet.

**Joel Newton, author of *Thames Path* (Trailblazer)**



# TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



Want to capture images in the most dramatic


places? BBC Natural

History lensman **Keith**

**Partridge** explains how to shoot at the extremes

**O**ver the last 25 years, I've taken cameras onto some of the world's most challenging mountain faces, shone light into vast underground caverns, been trapped in the apocalyptic innards of a belching volcano and stood on the highest point on the planet – all in search of the story and the shot.

Capturing images in such dramatic places relies upon one thing from which everything else hangs. If you can't travel to frame the shot then everything else becomes immaterial. Within that thought lies the notion of adventure and a complex game of physical strength, mental attitude, logistics and ergonomics where the outcome is uncertain.

Ultimately all those elements must come together, marking a move from the purely physical to something more instinctive, where the essence of being attuned to your situation gives an image atmosphere. That's when you push the button capturing not only what you see in front of you but also a sense of your own journey. There's the inspiration. 



© Keith Partridge. Keith's book, *The Adventure Game* (Sandstone Press, £25) is available now. [www.adventurecamera.co.uk](http://www.adventurecamera.co.uk)

## 1 Discard the first shots

First shots will inevitably be the 'standard ones'. Accept those for what they are and then try to look deeper into the subject and the reason why you want to capture what you see. Is there a story point? What is it that provokes emotion to take you beyond that simplistic view?

## 2 What's the direction?

Layers and exploiting the way they interact creates a journey through the image. The leading line in the foreground rocks takes you to the caver and then the vertical in the tree finishes at the canopy. Look out for the body position of your subject. They should be doing something that says something about their own feelings. The 'braced' legs suggest difficult terrain.

## 3 Stay protected

Protect your camera with hard case or soft pack and, on challenging terrain, it's good to have both hands free. Carry plenty of lens cleaning materials: for rain/water drops on the lens I use little packs of three-ply (non-balm) tissues; for dust I have a fine bristle paint brush; chemical hand-warmers can defog a lens. I also carry lens cleaning tissues and cleaning fluid to de-grease.





## 4 Light show

Think about the quality and quantity of light, and mixing light can help create extra depth. Often a camera will automatically get this kind of lighting wrong – either by over-exposing to make sense of the foreground or by under-exposing for the outside world: the art is to balance the exposure to leave us in the realm of the semi-silhouette. I like to play with exposure compensation – it's easy on most cameras – and by under-exposing by 0.7 of a stop, it brought out detail in the forest as well as the boulders in the foreground.

## 5 Let the audience fill in the gaps...

Leave the viewer wondering. 'Where is it? What would it be like to do that?' Shoot the unconventional. An image that asks questions, that is suggestive and not explicit, is bound to be stronger.





# TRAVEL CLINIC

## with Doctor Jane



## Stay well in the wild

Exploring the world's wildernesses is great – but you might be a long way from the nearest hospital, doctor or even toilet. **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** helps with some health DIYs

**T**he key to looking after yourself when you're out in the wilds is good preparation. Being fit enough for the trip you're undertaking will mitigate many problems; also, pack some first aid essentials. However, what if something happens when you're away from civilisation and you just have to wing it? Here are a few tips.

### Loo issues

Being away from other humans reduces the risks of stomach upsets as long as good hygiene is maintained, which includes proper disposal of your waste. To do this, campers should excavate a small pit latrine. Use a knife or spoon to cut out a square of turf; then, if you can, dig down at least 15cm to make a toilet hole (dimensions will depend on how much the facility will be used). Burn any used toilet paper or, better, wipe yourself with locally available

materials such as moss or leaves – though check the leaves don't sting or induce itching first. Alternatively, dribble your anus with river water while wafting with the other hand – this will clean you up nicely, and avoids the need to carry loo roll. Obviously hand-washing afterwards is important. When you've finished using your pit, sprinkle dirt on top and replace the turf. The local mini-beasts will enjoy a good feast, recycling your waste and leaving the environment unsullied.

If in snow, dig down to soil. If there is no soil, find a discreet place, spread the faeces thinly using a trowel or flat rock, then cover – if you can – with a sprinkle of soil, leaf litter or vegetation. Otherwise, smear a 3mm layer on a rock, like icing on a cake. Thin spreading speeds the natural breakdown of the excrement; exposure to sunlight (both its heat and UV rays) also inactivates most nasty microbes. Just beware of contaminating fragile ecosystems.

These techniques might seem unaesthetic, but dealing with your own products is so much better than being faced with those of others. There's nothing worse than encountering another's turd, complete with a white flag of soiled paper.

Having excreted responsibly and avoided contaminating local water bodies, you can safely wash up dirty dishes by scouring them using moss or river grit/gravel. This gives good bacteriological cleaning without putting harmful chemicals into the water. Drying plates in direct sunshine further sterilises them.

### After a tumble

Pain after an accident can often be reduced by immobilising the injured part. Slings can be improvised from clothing. Long-sleeved T-shirts are great for arm injuries. Put on the T-shirt but leave the uninjured arm free then tie the sleeves so that the injured arm is supported. Suspected fractures should be



**Wild ways**  
If you're heading into the wilderness you need to know some first aid

supported by strapping the injured limb to a branch of suitable size. Sometimes an old T-shirt might have to be cut up for this purpose, or strip fibres out of vines to use instead of tape or string. Take care not to tie anything too tight – swelling is usual after injury and circulation must not be compromised. Crutches and stretchers can be made; however, solid strapping can often allow an injured person to hobble to safety.

### Wild first aid

What can be improvised when you're far from a pharmacy? If



## FACT

Pack a crepe bandage – it can be used to support a sprained joint, slow the spread of snake venom and stem bleeding after an accident.



**‘Apply a large piece of clean cloth to a deep wound and tie it in place. This pressure dressing generally stops the bleeding’**

you’re on the move, seek out leaves that smell when crushed – the chrysanthemum family (including *Artemisia*) is good. Plants with stems that have a square cross section belong to the thyme and mint family, and many have pleasant-smelling leaves when scrumpled. Rubbing these on the skin helps confuse insects that are hungry for your blood. Garlic also works.

If you have nothing better, itchy bites can be calmed by applying minty toothpaste. Nasty scrapes and wounds can be treated with a poultice made from scrunched up leaves of the herbs woundwort and *prunella vulgaris* (or selfheal, as it’s also appropriately known). Many know nettle stings can be treated by rubbing them with dock leaves; it’s likely any green-leaved plants will probably relieve the sting. However, check

before using unfamiliar plants – some are covered in tiny irritating hairs, which make matters worse.

Dropping something on a toe-or-fingernail can provoke painful bleeding beneath the nail. Treat it by heating a piece of metal (such as the end of an unrolled paperclip) until it’s red-hot, and then use it to burn a hole in the nail, to let the blood drain. It’s immediately pain-relieving.

A victim of a deep laceration can lose a lot of blood – this is why so many wounds are stitched in A&E. Big deep wounds may need to be pulled together to stem the flow of blood. Apply a large piece of clean cloth (eg a T-shirt) to the

wound and tie it in place as best you can. This pressure dressing generally stops the bleeding so that the casualty can be taken to a clinic. If you’re in a tropical region, one strange option is to collect ants – one by one, encourage the insects to bite across the wound then break off their bodies, leaving their heads in place as a suture. It must be said: I’ve never tried this! 🐜

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth’s guide *How to Shit Around the World* contains plenty more advice on toileting and is pebble-dashed with travellers tales about diarrhoea; [www.wilson-howarth.com](http://www.wilson-howarth.com)





# TRAVEL YOUR WAY

Craghoppers, the authority in adventure travel clothing, helps you travel the way you want to...

**T**ravel means different things to different people. For some, it's simply stepping out of the front door to discover something new; for others it's hopping between airports, overlanding across a continent or delving into untamed deserts, mountains and jungles. Travel isn't a definable category – it's just about being on the move, and enjoying each step of the journey. Simply, travel is open to everyone.

Because of this, Craghoppers focuses on clothing and kit that makes your life as easy as possible, no matter what type of travel you're planning. Craghoppers consider the small things – allowing you to travel with a greater peace of mind – so you don't have to worry. They don't dwell on the negatives: as we all know, 99% of travel is wonderful. Craghoppers just like to design around the 1% to make sure you can enjoy all of the 99!

## Helping hand

Craghoppers design ethos is: when you use a piece of their kit, you can forget about it. Nothing will snag, split, irritate or fail. It has been created to allow you to get on with the task in hand, with the minimum fuss.

To this end, Craghoppers employs a range of technologies. Its clothes have sun, rain and wind protection to keep you cool, dry and warm as required. The unique NosiLife fabric treatment is a genuine breakthrough in textile innovation, offering wearers permanent insect repellency – no respraying required. Meanwhile, Craghoppers latest-edition RFID (radio-frequency identification) shielding has been designed specifically to combat the rise in cyber crime: their products – such as frequency-blocking trousers and wallets – help keep your vital data secure from remote attacks; clothing with a multitude of secret and zippable pockets deters pickpockets too.

## What's new?

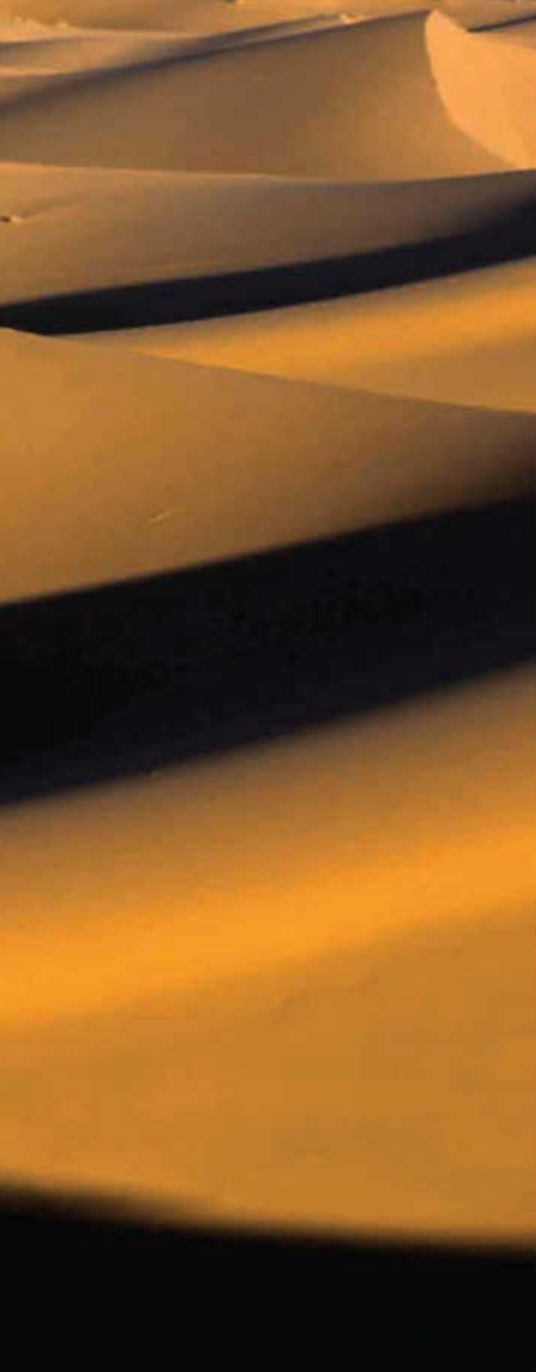
If Craghoppers kit is tough enough for Levison Wood – the first man to walk the length of the Nile – then it's tough enough for just about anything. Its Summer 2015 range has been inspired by his tenacious spirit, from the Compresslite jackets to NosiLife Tees.

Craghoppers Summer 2016 collection will be their most lifestyle-focused yet. They know people want to travel hand-luggage only, however, you'll still want to feel sharp-dressed and ready to go at the other end. This collection is a response to that: elegant, ultra-lightweight garments, some with insect repellency and sun protection, some with crease recovery: the perfect travel range.

## YOUR Craghoppers

Travel is all about experiences – what you see, who you meet. To capture this, Craghoppers have joined up with *National*





Geographic photographer Faruk Akbas, who manages to capture those moments that inspire you to get out on the road (as seen above). Craghoppers also support The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, which highlights the plight of mountain gorillas and have now made an award-winning film, *Hope*, narrated by Sir David Attenborough.

Finally, Craghoppers ambassadors – from Dakar rivers to conservationists – are helping you plan your own adventures. Why not get involved? Search for #mycraghoppers on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media to find a whole host of images and experiences.

**CRAGHOPPERS**  
Discover Your World



## THE EXPERTS ON CRAGHOPPERS



**FARUK AKBAS**  
Photographer &  
videographer  
(pictured above)

### Favourite kit:

Kiwi Thermic Jacket

"As a photographer who enjoys shooting year-round, no matter what the weather, it is vital that my clothing allows me to do my job well. This jacket is perfect for cold and wet terrains."



**PETER MCBRIDE**  
Environmental  
Film Maker

### Favourite kit:

NosiLife Stretch Trousers  
"These trousers give me all the

benefits of the NosiLife insect repellent technology, while the lightweight material and stretch design help make shooting in hot climates that much easier."



**TAMSIN JONES**  
Motorbike racer,  
Dakar Rally  
competitor and  
women's world record  
holder for highest altitude  
ride up Everest

**Favourite kit:** Kamala Jacket

"The definition of comfort and warmth. The jacket's main body is made from synthetic insulation to trap heat while the arms and back are made from lightweight fleece –



**VERONICA  
VECELLIO**  
Gorilla Program  
Coordinator, Dian  
Fossey Gorilla Fund

**Favourite kit:** NosiLife Darla

Long-Sleeved Shirt

"Everything I need in a shirt. The fabric offers permanent insect repellency as well as UV protection, and the quick-drying technology is handy when you get caught in the Rwandan rain. Enables me to do my job even in the trickiest of circumstances."



For more information go to [www.craghoppers.com](http://www.craghoppers.com)





**Deadly deluge**  
Search and rescue teams patrol on boats in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

#### FACT

Katrina ranks sixth overall in strength of recorded Atlantic hurricanes. Its winds blew at about 280k/h and stretched for 140km from east to centre.

Instant Expert

# Hurricane Katrina

**Of course I remember this awful storm – why are we talking about it now?**

The end of August marks ten years since Katrina, one of the deadliest hurricanes in history. It caused over 1,800 deaths and £59 billion of damage. It hit Cuba and the Bahamas, and several US states, but it was Louisiana – specifically New Orleans – that was most devastated. Over half the city's population of 480,000 were displaced, and looting and flooding were widespread.

**Has New Orleans recovered?**

It's getting there. While the poorer east of the city is still struggling to deal with the after-effects, extensive regeneration has restored much of New Orleans to its former glory. Many buildings have been rebuilt, while the 560km-long flood defence system has been revamped and fortified.

**What is there to see today?**

For a sobering reminder of the disaster, visit the cemetery district's Katrina Memorial. Also, outside the Convention Center, there is a more unusual reminder:

a public artwork comprising the wreckage of a small house sitting atop a tree.

**What about non-Katrina sights?**

The French Quarter is entertainment central: Jackson Square brims with street artists, musicians and dancers, and Bourbon Street is home to many jazz clubs. Mardi Gras isn't until February, but in truth the city's love of costume and performance shines through year round. In short, the Big Easy's got its mojo back.

**Anything else?**

Yes. New Orleans is a city of foodies – as is evidenced by the fact that, despite the population currently sitting at around 72% of its pre-Katrina figure, the number of restaurants is 70% up.

Also, during the rebuilding, city residents – fiercely proud of their local food – swapped old recipes that were lost in the storm; if you can't get to New Orleans, get a taster from the cookbook *Cooking Up A Storm* by Marcelle Bienvenu and Judy Walker, which brings together the best dishes.

5-step guide to...

## MULTI-DAY WALKING

**1 Choose a route that's within your capabilities**

If you've never walked day after day, then practice. Try a weekend away, then a few more days, in the sort of terrain that matches your chosen trail. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

**2 Be ruthless about pack weight and bulk**

Carry as little as possible, but still pack all the essentials. You'll be carrying this load for days, weeks, maybe months. It needs to be comfortable and not a tiresome, energy-sapping burden. Alternatively, use a baggage transfer company, then you can take monstrous amounts.

**3 Check the weather forecast on a daily basis**

The forecast says gales and rain? Maybe skip that day, or at least dress for the occasion and take precautions. If it's going to be hot and sunny, remember to carry water and use sunscreen.

Forewarned is forearmed.

**4 Pace yourself and have a flexible plan**

You need to finish each day on the trail in relative comfort, leaving enough stamina and energy in reserve to do the same again tomorrow, all week, and maybe into the next month. Extend a day's walk if you feel fit, or cut a day short before you get too tired.

**5 Enjoy the experience**

Seriously, if it isn't enjoyable, then you're on the wrong trail. The sights and sounds of the countryside, history and heritage, geology underfoot and the birds of the air are all part of the experience of the trail.

By Paddy Dillon, author of *The National Trails* (Cicerone, £18.95); a new edition is out in September.



Keepers & elephants bonding,  
Chitwan National Park,  
Nepal

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World Travel Clothing

Photo: Faruk Akbas Travel Photographer  
& Craghoppers Ambassador



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■ Traveller's Guide To...

# GEODESIC 2-PERSON TENTS

Need a tent on your travels? Then a two-man geodesic (freestanding) design is a good option, offering space and stability. We review some of the best...

## PORCH

The porch is outside the inner tent but under the protection of the waterproof fly sheet. This is the area you'll use for storing your luggage/rucksack and wet shoes; you may also use it for cooking if the weather is bad. Ensure it's large enough for your needs.

## INNER TENT

Some tents are erected by pitching the inner first, which is fine in good weather. Depending on the design this can also give you the option of using only the inner in hot countries.

## GUY LINES

Guy lines help add stability, particularly in windy conditions, but a well-designed tent will need fewer of them – meaning a lighter weight.

## PITCHING

Before you buy a tent, ask if you can try putting it up yourself. If it is time-consuming or complicated indoors, imagine how much harder it will be when you have jetlag and are trying to erect it in the rain.

## PACKING

When you get your new tent it will be vacuum packed perfectly into its sack, but that doesn't mean you'll ever fit it back inside! It's worth pitching it at home first, then trying to pack it away afterwards to make sure it all goes back in. If it doesn't you can always buy a different bag.

## POLES

Poles add weight – look for those made of light but sturdy materials. Colour coded poles make a tent easier and quicker to erect, though you can colour code them yourself.

## WEIGHT

Travellers on multi-day backpacking trips will want their tent to be as light as possible – but uber-light poles and fabrics command a higher price. If you plan to camp in one place, tent weight may not be an issue; if you're on the move, you may consider the cost justified.

## OUTER/FLYSHEET

The flysheet goes over the inner tent. The two must not touch; if they do, condensation and rain can penetrate the interior and you will get wet. Some tents are erected by pitching the outer first – a good option in bad weather, as the inner remains dry.

## DESIGN

Each tent offers similar features so consider whether the design of those features works for you. First, space: can two of you lie comfortably without touching the ends? Is there enough headroom to sit up in? Second, entrances: how many are there? If only one, is it easy for two people to access without climbing over each other? Third, mosquito netting: does the door have meshing that enables you to let light and air in but keep critters out? Finally, pegs: are they strong enough for your destination? You can buy alternative pegs separately if required.



# Geodesic 2-person tents

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



Pitch time: 14 mins 51 secs

## SPRAYWAY SX2 £160

**THE TEST:** If you need a good, entry-level 2-person tent, the SX2 does the job. The tent is semi-geodesic: the main structure is free standing, but you need to peg out the front porch to complete it. The outer is pitched first – good for camping where rain is a high possibility. The inner tent toggles and clips into the outer, though this is a bit fiddly for one person to do by themselves. The bag contains no instructions, which explains why it takes a little longer to put up than others.

Once up, the SX2 offers good space between the inner and outer, which helps prevent condensation forming. The pegs are sturdy and easy to put in the ground. The porch is fairly small, and it's a snug fit for two people inside, but there is enough headroom to sit up near the porch. For ventilation there's a small vent at the foot end and two on the sides; you can also unzip the door to create a mosquito net opening.

Weighing 2.8kg, it's third heaviest here – to be expected at the budget end of the scale. Packing it away in the bag is straightforward.

**THE VERDICT:** Lacks the finishing touches and extra ventilation of more expensive models, but good value for those on a budget.

### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Packability: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

[www.sprayway.com](http://www.sprayway.com)



Pitch time: 10 mins 13 secs

## VANGO Sirocco £180

**THE TEST:** This tent comes with a picture and instructions, helping to make pitching quicker. The poles were not colour coded (though you could do this yourself), which caused some confusion. This is a semi-geodesic, requiring some pegging out at the back and front to complete the shape. It is inner pitch first.

Inside it feels quite spacious, mainly due to its height: two people can sit up in the middle of the tent. Ventilation is good (almost half of the inner walls are vented) but the flysheet must be well pegged out to create enough space between the inner and outer walls. The porch is a fair size – not the biggest here but large enough for rucksacks. My main gripe is the window in the door: it can't be covered so lets in early light and isn't great for security.

The carry bag has a wide opening, so packing the tent away is a breeze – though its packed size is the largest here. Weighing 2.95kg, it's the second heaviest on test and, as with the SX2, it lacks the finishing touches of more expensive models.

**THE VERDICT:** Good amount of headroom and easy to pack away, though the weight, pack size and the need to peg it out well may mean you opt to spend a little more.

### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Packability: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

[www.vango.co.uk](http://www.vango.co.uk)



Pitch time: 11 mins 42 secs

## BIG AGNES Burton Nightcap £230

**THE TEST:** Certainly not discreet, on first glance the Burton Nightcap looks more like a festival tent than a serious camping option. What it does offer – courtesy of its dark walls – is a boon for those who like to sleep in late.

There are no pictures or instructions: the pitch time included searching on Google for clues; however, once I saw a photo it was fairly straightforward to erect. It is inner pitch first. Its crossover pole design creates more of a dome shape, which means more space inside, but less stability in bad weather. It has a fair size porch and the inner has room for three at a push. Height wise, you can sit up easily. The main drawback is that there is only one door and, as the only option is to sleep horizontally across the tent, getting out from the far side without disturbing your tent-mate is a challenge. There's plenty of ventilation around the top and sides, but the flysheet must be pegged out well to avoid contact between the inner and outer.

It weighs 2.15kg, joint second lightest here. Packing it away isn't the easiest, but possible.

**THE VERDICT:** Good for late risers and those prepared to pay a little more for a lighter tent with slightly fewer features but lots of style.

### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Packability: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

[www.bigagnes.com](http://www.bigagnes.com)





## How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit tents that they felt were most suitable for adventurous travellers, being small, lightweight and easy to pitch in all terrains. From the 14 we were sent our editor, Phoebe Smith, took them out on the road to see which performed best. The time it took to pitch each model is shown, along with the 'Value Buy' and 'Best in Test' for the overall best buy.



Pitch time: 27 mins (first time)  
1 min 27 secs (second time)

### HEIMPLANET The Wedge £368

**THE TEST:** The Wedge ditches regular poles in favour of inflatable ones. There is no picture or instructions so erecting it is a case of trial and error (which part explains the pitch time). Figuring out how to pump it up is fairly easy, but not realising other valves were open, and faffing to fit the valve attachment and pump simultaneously led to difficulties. Once you've figured it out, though, it's the quickest to erect.

The geodesic design means you simply peg it out and it's good to go. The 'poles' are surprisingly sturdy (Heimplanet designs for expeditions). The inner and outer tents are attached so you need to ensure you get enough traction to stop them touching. The upper half of the tent allows good ventilation. Inside, it's a good size and width for two; there's enough headroom at the front to sit up. There's also a groundsheet in the porch (a nice addition) and you can unzip the door to create a mosquito net.

It's heavy though – at 3.65kg (without the pump) it's the heaviest here by far. It's also fairly difficult to pack away.

**THE VERDICT:** A sturdy inflatable option for those who want something different, but the weight may be a turn off.

#### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Packability: ★★★★★  
Ease of use: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.heimplanet.com](http://www.heimplanet.com)



Pitch time: 6 mins 1 sec

### JACK WOLFSKIN Exolight II £400

**THE TEST:** For £400 you'd expect instructions and a picture but the Exolight II comes with neither. Fortunately that's no big deal – once the poles are up it becomes fairly obvious where everything should go, which means a quick pitch time. The poles are attached to the outer sheet, and the outer and inner are attached to each other, which makes it quicker to erect. However, this means that you can't pitch the inner by itself – a shame, as this can be a useful feature when you're camping in warmer climates.

The Exolight II's interior is not the most spacious, but there is good amount of headroom. Better yet, the tent has two entrances and two porches, both of which are large enough to store a rucksack and to cook in – a real bonus. There's lots of ventilation (about half the tent) to help with condensation. The pegs are decent.

At 2.15kg it's joint second lightest here. Size-wise, it's nice and compact. It packs back into its bag easily.

**THE VERDICT:** A good weight and size for travelling, with the bonus of two porches for those who need them, but some may want to pay a little more to lose some more weight.

#### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Packability: ★★★★★  
Ease of use: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.jackwolfskin.co.uk](http://www.jackwolfskin.co.uk)



Pitch time: 5 mins 35 secs

### TERRA NOVA Superlite Voyager II £430

**THE TEST:** If money is no object, this is the ultimate lightweight tent. Helped by a clear picture and instructions, and colour coded poles and tabs, pitching was quick and easy. It is inner pitch first. Due to its design (the pole connects to the inner directly), the inner can be used without the flysheet in hot countries. Also the outer sheet fixes into the same eyelets as the inner, creating a good amount of space between the two so you don't have to be an expert to pitch it out.

It's not the biggest on test but it doesn't taper too much, making it snug but adequate for two people. The single porch is a good size for two rucksacks. It offers a large amount of ventilation all around the top and sides; the door is half-vented, giving permanent airflow.

Where it really excels is in its weight: at 1.6kg it's the lightest here by far, easy to pack away into its bag and is very compact for your luggage. The only niggle is the pegs: they are super light but very easy to bend so not great on tough ground – consider replacing them. Aside from that, the perfect travel tent.

**THE VERDICT:** A well-featured tent that's easy to pitch and super lightweight, ideal for travel – as long as you can afford it.

#### IN BRIEF

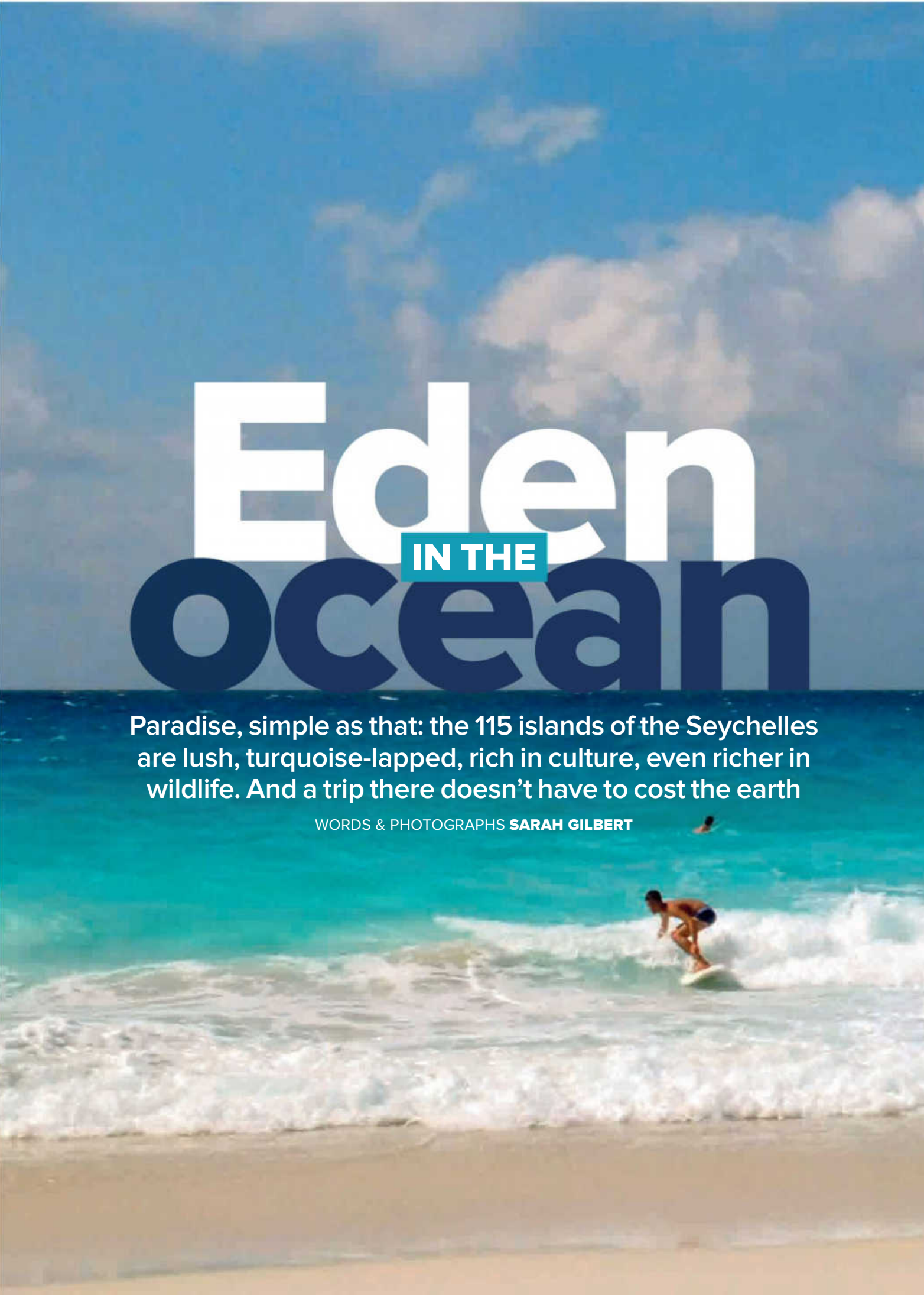
Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Packability: ★★★★★  
Ease of use: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.terra-nova.co.uk](http://www.terra-nova.co.uk)



# Eden IN THE ocean

Paradise, simple as that: the 115 islands of the Seychelles are lush, turquoise-lapped, rich in culture, even richer in wildlife. And a trip there doesn't have to cost the earth

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **SARAH GILBERT**









# Seychelles

## Blue is the warmest colour

The Anse Coco coast on La Digue island; the markets on Victoria and La Digue sell a delicious array of fish and fruit



**T**he steep climb had been suffocatingly hot, but my reward was laid out before me. From my vantage point on top of Morne Blanc I looked out over a string of tiny jewel-like islands, verdant oases fringed with blindingly white sand floating in an expanse of dazzling blues – aquamarine seeping into azure, azure into cobalt.

The Seychelles – an archipelago of 115 islands, many of which are uninhabited – is an archetypal tropical paradise sitting in splendid isolation in the middle of the Indian Ocean, four degrees south of the equator. Today it's synonymous with five-star luxury and private island idylls that attract a succession of celebrities. But accommodation is actually as diverse as the islands themselves and the extraordinary landscapes are accessible to those on a more meagre budget. There's no need for fine-dining restaurants when you can feast feet-in-the-sand on Creole staples, and the wild nature and sublime beaches are free of charge.

There's a long and varied history here too. In 1502, the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama passed through the coralline Outer Islands, which he named after himself – the Amirantes, or the Admiral's Islands. The granitic Inner Islands, with their monumental boulders moulded by wind, rain, sand and sea, were formed from the leftovers of the prehistoric supercontinent, Gondwana. They were already a pit stop for pirates when the French, realising that they were a useful transit point for African and

Asian trade, staked their claim in 1756, bringing with them slaves from Africa.

By 1811, the islands had fallen under British control and didn't gain full independence until 1976. It's all created a genuine melting pot of European, African and Asian influences, and a polyglot nation that speaks Creole, English and a smattering of French.

## 'Big' island

There are three main islands, each with their own distinct personality. Mahé, the largest and most developed, is home to the international airport, as well as about 90% of Seychellois. It has its share of idyllic beaches – there are over 65 of them on this 27km-long and 8km-wide island, backed by vegetation rather than concrete resorts. It is also home to Victoria, one of the world's smallest capitals.


Fishing is as important as tourism here and on an early morning visit to the colourful Sir Selwyn Clarke Market, I joined the locals watching the catch of the day – giant red snapper, rainbow-coloured parrotfish and silver-grey shark – being expertly gutted and cleaned, while stallholders shouted to each other in singsong Creole. And it wasn't just fish: mounds of red-hot chillies, colossal ►

**'The island is like a giant garden; everywhere you look there are mangos, guavas and jackfruit weighing down branches'**









**‘It was spectacular standing  
on the beach: the dazzlingly  
white sand, so powder-fine it  
squeaked, was licked by  
white-tipped waves’**



**A dip in interest...**  
Secluded and  
spectacular, Anse  
Georgette on Praslin is  
an easy meander away









◀ breadfruit and fragrant spices were among the fresh produce spread across the many little stalls. In fact the island is like a giant garden; everywhere you look there are mangos, guavas and jackfruit weighing down branches.

Away from Victoria, the road snaked up into the mountains that form a central spine along the length of the island; here, walking trails thread amid the high-altitude tropical forest and cooling breezes of Morne Seychellois National Park. Far from manicured, the lush foliage is barely constrained – no surprise that the island's original name was L'Île d'Abondance.

Hidden in the hills, Le Jardin du Roi is a wooden plantation house that, with a few renovations, has been in the same family for seven generations. A former cinnamon and vanilla plantation, today it overlooks terraced gardens filled with exotic trees and shrubs. The entrance fee allows you to follow a self-guided trail, and I got a taste of Seychellois history as I explored the spice-scented pathways lined with citronella bushes, nutmeg trees and evocatively named medicinal plants such as Job's tears and lion's ear. The air was suffused with the heady perfume of ylang-ylang and patchouli.

You can hire a car to get around Mahé – they drive on the left – but I let a public bus navigate the island's many twists and turns for me. On Sunday afternoon I headed to Beau Vallon on the north-west coast where, after church, the locals take their rum and snapper to barbecue on the beach. I sat under the shade of a towering takamaka tree until the setting sun streaked the ocean pink and gold.

## Indian Ocean erotica

Praslin, the second-largest island, has a small airport but can easily be reached by an affordable one-hour catamaran journey. It shares the same gin-clear waters but has a quieter, less hurried pace. And at the island's heart is a tangled, primordial jungle – one of the best-preserved ecosystems in the world.

The World Heritage site of Vallée de Mai, tucked into Praslin National Park, is home to the *coco de mer*, endemic to just two islands in the Seychelles. This iconic palm produces the largest – and arguably the most erotic – seed in the world, shaped like a woman's buttocks. Sailors used to find them floating on the ocean or washed up on deserted beaches and they became known as the 'coconuts of the sea'.

As I walked the trails, vegetation seemed to burst from the forest floor – no wonder people thought that this might be the original Garden of Eden. The lofty palms almost blocked out the sun, their enormous fan-shaped leaves allowing only narrow

shafts of light to sneak through. From high in the trees came the chatter of the Seychelles bulbul and I thought I heard a high-pitched whistle, the call of the elusive Seychelles black parrot.

Once prized for the medicinal properties of their jelly-like flesh, the *coco de mer* is now protected and comes with a certificate and a sizeable price tag. The Vallée de Mai itself has a €20 entry fee but a cheaper, larger and

**'The lofty palms almost blocked out the sun, their enormous fan-shaped leaves allowing only narrow shafts of light to sneak through'**

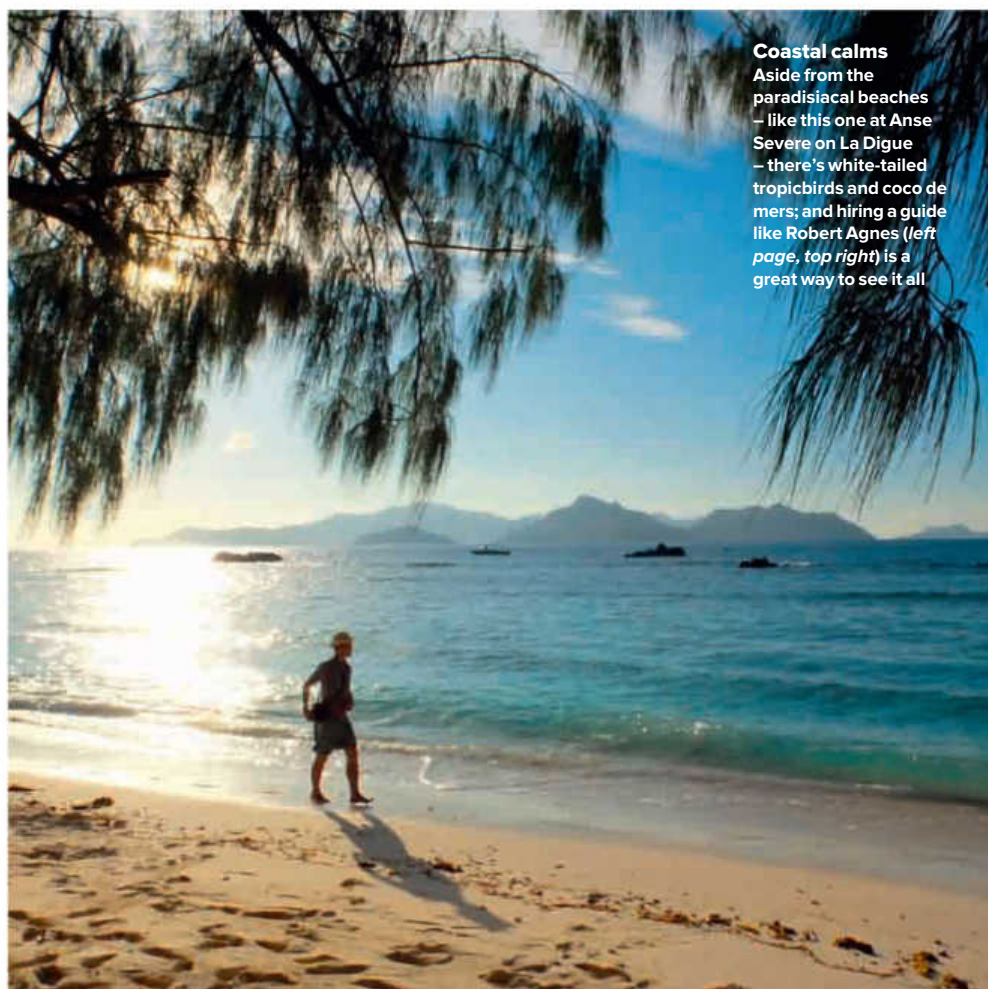
far less-visited enclave for the *coco de mer* is a new reserve, Fond Ferdinand in the south of the island, where you can hike the trails for views over the port of Baie Ste Anne.

Praslin has no shortage of magnificent beaches. On the north-west of the island, the jungle-backed crescent of sand known as Anse Lazio (*anse* is French for cove) makes a regular appearance on 'world's most beautiful beaches' lists. However, the beach that topped my list was on the property of the five-star Constance Lémuria; as all Seychelles beaches are public (if you can reach them), you can call the resort in the morning and ask to be put on the guest list for Anse Georgette.

As I wandered along the long, undulating path that skirts the resort's 18-hole golf course, I got my first tantalising glimpse of Georgette. Standing on it was even more spectacular: the dazzlingly white sand, so powder-fine it squeaked, was licked by white-tipped waves; there were whispering casuarina trees offering shade from the equatorial sun; there was barely another soul in sight.

## Wild isles

In order to meet more of the archipelago's wild inhabitants, I opted for a day trip to three small islands. My first stop was Cousin, ►



**Coastal calms**  
Aside from the paradisiacal beaches – like this one at Anse Severe on La Digue – there's white-tailed tropicbirds and *coco de mer*; and hiring a guide like Robert Agnes (left page, top right) is a great way to see it all



## Giant steps

The Aldabra are one of the few Indian Ocean giant tortoises to survive extinction



◀ a former coconut plantation that has been transformed by BirdLife International into a biodiversity hotspot – it's a breeding ground for hawksbill turtles and home to the last population of Seychelles warblers. There are an impressive number of bird species on this mini-Galápagos, and on my guided tour I got up close to nesting white-tailed tropicbirds, which were completely unfazed by the arrival of the tourist paparazzi.

On Curieuse Island, a former leper colony, a large population of prehistoric-looking Aldabra giant tortoises roam free, some of them around 150 years old and weighing a hefty 400kg. As I walked along the raised boardwalk that runs through the sulphurous-smelling mangroves, I watched giant red crabs scuttling sideways into their holes and saw the scarlet flash of the tiny Madagascar fody.

After a beach feast of grilled red snapper, I donned a snorkel and flippers and jumped into the translucent water around the granitic islet of St Pierre. Floating above an array of vibrant coral – flat-topped table, clusters of mushroom, forests of staghorn – and a steady stream of extravagantly coloured fish – oriental sweetlips, parrotfish, clownfish – I watched as a graceful sea turtle disappeared into the depths.

## A touch of Crusoe

A 15-minute ferry ride separates Praslin and diminutive La Digue, the smallest of the inhabited islands. Out of the three, La Digue has clung most firmly to vestiges of the

**'At L'Union Estate, the tranquillity is only shattered by the odd thud from a falling coconut. There I followed the palm-shaded path to one of the world's most photographed beaches, Anse Source D'Argent'**

archipelago's older, simpler way of life; French, Italian and German travellers are long-time fans of its lush beauty and back-to-nature feel, where shop signs read 'Open some days, closed others'. La Passe on the west coast, where the boats arrive, is the epitome of a sleepy tropical port. There are no large resorts or international chains here, just simple, family-run guesthouses and a couple of stylish boutique hotels.

With no airport, only a couple of surfaced roads and virtually no cars – as well as a few brightly painted ox carts to ferry

visitors around – bicycle is the best way by far to travel along the island's sandy streets. I cycled through the village, exchanging greetings with the locals as I passed stalls weighed down with an array of tropical fruits, a gaggle of schoolchildren and a man with a string of fresh fish hanging off his handlebars.

I left my bike in the vanilla-scented L'Union Estate, an historic plantation where the tranquillity is only shattered by the occasional thud from a falling coconut. I followed the palm-shaded path that leads to one of the world's most photographed beaches, Anse Source D'Argent – just one in a line of jaw-droppingly beautiful bays, flanked by elemental grey boulders that spill into the turquoise water.

Despite L'Union Estate's SRS100 (£5) entry fee, there's no shortage of day-trippers along this stretch of shoreline. But, with a bit of effort, there are even more idyllic beaches to discover. I cycled slowly across the island to Grand Anse on the wilder east coast. With guide Robert Agnes (overgrown trails can be hard to find), I clambered over rocks and wound between increasingly hard-to-reach coves to arrive at Anse Marron, a glorious Crusoe-esque sweep of sand on the island's southern tip.

Beyond the beaches, much of La Digue is an impassable mass of rock covered in luxuriant greenery, but there are walking trails. Early one morning, before the heat of the day set in, I headed inland and took the winding, narrow path up Nid d'Aigle (Eagle's Nest), the island's highest point. From here I enjoyed panoramic views over forested slopes and the islands beyond.

Later, I cycled around the northern tip of the island to Anse Banane, where I'd made a reservation at Chez Jules. If he has no customers, the garrulous Jules is in bed by 9pm but at weekends his rustic eatery is packed with locals. That evening there were seven Europeans sitting around his communal, wooden table. There's no menu to speak of; large platters of delicious Seychellois dishes just kept emerging from his simple kitchen: smoked fish salad, octopus (caught by Jules that afternoon) in a delicate, coconut-milk curry; fish fillet à la Creole. We washed it all down with ice-cold bottles of the local beer SeyBrew, while Jules taught us some Creole in his lilting accent, a relaxed hybrid of French, English and West Indian with its own distinct inflections. "Manze (eat)," he encouraged us, telling us to use our hands.

We rounded off with shots of sweet, dark local rum before I freewheeled back down the coal-black hillside with the aid of a torch and the full moon, to the cry of "Bonswar! Until we meet again." ■





# Seychelles Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Victoria (Mahé Island)  
**Population:** 91,650  
**Languages:** Seychellois Creole, English, French  
**Time:** GMT+4  
**International dialling code:** +248  
**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals  
**Money:** Seychelles rupee (SCR) currently around 19 to the UK£. Prices for most tourist services are often quoted in euros. Credit cards are accepted at upmarket hotels and restaurants; take cash for cheaper establishments, markets and taxis. There are ATMs at the airport and on the three main islands.

### When to go

|     |     |      |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Jan | Feb | Mar  | Apr | May | Jun |
| Jul | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |

Temperature between 24-32°C year-round, with some humidity at all times. Seasons are defined by the trade winds

■ Southeast trade winds bring a relatively dry spell. Prices rise July-August; book accommodation well in advance.

■ There can be heavy rain, especially in December and January (though these are busy months – book in advance); temperature rises, reaching a peak in April.

### Health & safety

Hepatitis A immunisation recommended. The sun is strong so avoid excessive exposure, especially around midday. Tap water is safe to drink. There's no risk of malaria but it's wise to protect yourself from mosquito bites.

### Further reading & information

**Seychelles** (Bradt, 2012)  
**Mauritius, Réunion & Seychelles** (Lonely Planet, 2013)  
[www.seychelles.travel](http://www.seychelles.travel)



### More online

Visit [www.wanderlust.co.uk/159](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/159)

for links to more content:

#### ARCHIVE ARTICLES

◆ **Rebuilding the Seychelles: the former leper colony of Curieuse** – issue 99

◆ **Solitude in the Seychelles** – issue 90

#### PLANNING GUIDES

◆ **Seychelles travel guide**

## THE TRIP

**i** The author travelled with **Rainbow Tours** (020 7666 1250, [rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk)) on its 12-day Secret Seychelles tour, which visits Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. Prices start from £1,935, including international flights, B&B accommodation and shared road and ferry transfers. This price is valid for departures between 11 August and 31 October 2015.

### Getting there

There are no direct flights to the Seychelles from the UK. **Etihad** ([etihad.com](http://etihad.com)) flies UK-Seychelles via Abu Dhabi, Emirates ([emirates.com](http://emirates.com)) via Dubai. Flight time is approximately 13 hours; return fares from London start from around £540.

### Getting around

**Cat Cocos** ([catcocos.com](http://catcocos.com)) runs a regular boat service between Mahé, Praslin and La Digue: Mahé to Praslin takes one hour; Mahé to La Digue via Praslin takes 90 minutes. **Buses** are the most common mode of transport in Mahé and Praslin but stop around 7pm; a ride costs SCR55 (25p). Car hire is available from around €30 (£21) a day. **Mason's Travel** ([masonstravel.com](http://masonstravel.com)) offers a variety of land and sea excursions around the islands.

### Cost of travel

**Food can be expensive** as most produce has to be imported but you can get a substantial takeaway from around SCR35 (£2); many B&Bs have a barbecue you can use. Expect to pay around £90 for a full-day boat excursion.

### Accommodation

There's everything from basic B&Bs (from around \$79 [£60] a night for a double) and self-catering villas, to private island resorts (from around €900 [£645] a night for a double, full board).

For a basic option, the **Glacis Heights Villa** (Mahé; [glacisheightsvilla.com](http://glacisheightsvilla.com)) start from €115 [£82] per night B&B.

The Garden Villas at **Le Domaine de L'Orangerie** (La Digue; [orangerie.sc](http://orangerie.sc)) start from €360 [£251] per night B&B.

**Garden View Villas** (Mahé; [fourseasons.com/seychelles](http://fourseasons.com/seychelles)) at Four Seasons Resort Seychelles start from €920 [£660] per night (excluding taxes) B&B.

### Food & drink

Try Seychellois dishes such as fish baked in a banana leaf, octopus salad, fruit bat curry and **shark chutney** (boiled shark meat cooked with juice from the bilimbi tree and served with papaya salad and dhal). Wash it down with an exotic fruit juice, such as guava or soursop.

## SEYCHELLES HIGHLIGHTS



### 1 Mahé

Explore Victoria's lively market, the mountain trails and, of course, the beaches.

### 2 Morne Seychellois National Park, Mahé

Home to the country's highest peak; enjoy a hike through thick tropical forest.

### 3 Ste Anne Marine National Park

Discover the Seychelles underwater world a short distance from Mahé.

### 4 Curieuse Island (pictured)

If you can't get to Aldabra Atoll, you'll find plenty of Aldabra giant tortoises roaming here.

### 5 Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve, Praslin

Home to the endemic coco de mer, once thought to be the original forbidden fruit.

### 6 Anse Lazio, Praslin

A contender for the world's most beautiful beach.

### 7 La Digue

The smallest and most relaxed of the three main islands, with magnificent beaches and a mountainous interior.

### 8 Cousin Island Special Reserve

A biodiversity hotspot with a host of birdlife.





IT'S BACK, IT'S BIGGER THAN EVER AND READY FOR YOUR ENTRIES,

*Wanderlust*

# TRAVEL PHOTO OF THE YEAR 2015

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ENTER AND WIN A PHOTO COMMISSION TO  
**WESTERN  
AUSTRALIA**  
OR £3,000 IN CASH



# SO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE A WINNING SHOT, READ ON...

**B**alloons floating over Bagan's iconic temples, lightning illuminating the Dead Sea, and an alert cheetah cub standing

to attention in South Africa were just some of the scenes that were finalists in *Wanderlust's* 2014 Travel Photo of the Year. Now, the UK's biggest and best travel photo competition returns and we're after more spellbinding images from intrepid explorers like you.

The four category winners of our **Amateur** competition will have the opportunity of a lifetime – a *Wanderlust* photo commission to Western Australia thanks to Tourism Western Australia – while the winner of our **Portfolio** contest will take home a cash prize of £3,000.

## Win a commission

### AMATEUR COMPETITION

Wildlife-rich waters, vast rocky expanses, and more sunshine than anywhere else in the world: that's why Western Australia has become one of travel's most exciting draws.

From its endless white beaches separating the rugged red interior from

its deep blue ocean reefs, Australia's largest state is a nature lover's dream and leaves no shortage of opportunities for photographers either.

Its diverse landscape is just one attraction for travellers – its capital Perth is a vibrant city (*Wanderlust's* Lyn Hughes also says so on p139) that's full of culture and excitement. All this is why *Wanderlust* has teamed up with Tourism Western Australia ([westernaustralia.com](http://westernaustralia.com)) to whisk four winners off to Western Australia on an extraordinary photographic commission.

## How to enter

Entries can be snapped anywhere and at any time, but need to fit into one of our four categories: **People, Wildlife, Landscape or Travel Icons**. With the Travel Icon category, we're after shots of people, landscapes or events that have achieved a landmark status in the travel world.

So do you have a picture of the Colosseum from a fresh new angle or a mesmerising photo of whales off Baja California sitting on those old memory cards? Send those images to us, now.

## Win £3,000!

### PORTFOLIO COMPETITION

Can you create a series of shots that tells a story – of a vibrant festival, a wildlife phenomena, a culture undergoing change? Then put your creative talents to the test.

The Portfolio competition is open to both amateur and professional photographers, who should enter five eye-catching shots, all of which are remarkable in their own right but when blended together, tell a tantalising tale about the world we travel in.

Like the Amateur competition, entries in the Portfolio competition must fit into one of our four categories: People, Wildlife, Landscape or Travel Icons. However there'll be just one winner, who will bag themselves £3,000.

## Send us your photos

To enter, and see the full T&Cs, visit [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk) or fill in the form on p89. Closing date for entries is 31 October 2015. Good luck!

EXPERIENCE  
**EXTRAORDINARY**  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

*Wanderlust*

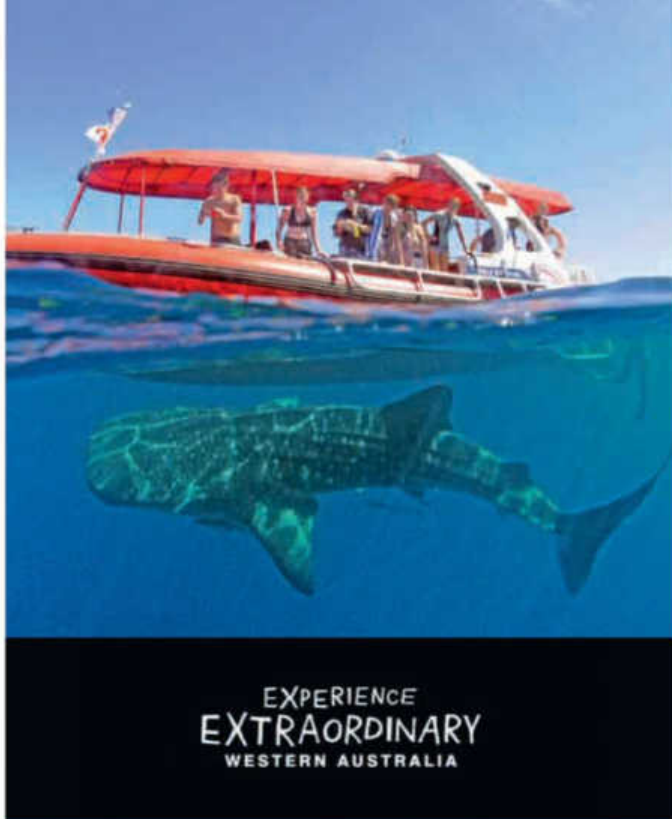


**Destinations**  
the holiday & travel show  
Manchester EventCity 21 - 24 Jan 2016  
Olympia London 4 - 7 Feb 2016

### Out of this world

The Milky Way's celestial beauty illuminates the Bungle Bungle range in Purnululu National Park





## GET WILD IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Wildlife, landscapes, people and travel icons: Western Australia is the perfect destination for anyone looking for inspiration for any of the *Wanderlust* Photo of the Year categories. The country's largest state offers travellers an eclectic rainbow of colours with 12,500km of white beaches contrasting with the deep red ancient rock formations and lush greenery of the state's southern regions.

Nature lovers can swim with the world's largest fish – the whale shark – or snorkel with manta rays at Ningaloo Reef, rub shoulders with wild dolphins and walk in the rainforest canopies along the southwest coast. Moving inland, you can take the expert advice of an Aboriginal guide as you explore the beehive-like rock formations in Purnululu National Park.

Away from the extraordinary landscapes, Western Australia's cities have plenty to offer too. The sunny capital, Perth, has a vibrant but easy-going pace. To cool off, the city is surrounded by the Swan River and Indian Ocean.

In the state's northern reaches, Broome is brimming with exotic heritage and art, while the town's Roebuck Bay is home to the 'Staircase to the Moon', where the receding tide and rising tide combine for a spectral natural phenomenon.

Historic Fremantle is perfect for whale-watching and is just a short boat ride from car-free Rottnest Island, while Margaret River – famed for its gourmet food and wine experiences – is just one of Western Australia's many tastebud-tantalising hotspots.

Discover this extraordinary land for yourself when you travel with Tourism Western Australia – [www.westernaustralia.com](http://www.westernaustralia.com)

## NIKON CAMERA PRIZES FOR THE RUNNERS-UP

Didn't bag the Western Australia trip? Never mind, *all* our **Runners Up** and **Highly Recommended** entrants will win amazing Nikon cameras. The Runners Up can get new perspectives with the Nikon D5500 + 18-55 VR II lens camera kit (RRP £719.99) – a light, user-friendly model packed with vari-angle touch-screen display, WiFi, 24.2-megapixel resolution and full HD

filming. Meanwhile, our **Highly Recommended** entrants will become proud owners of the Nikon COOLPIX P610 (RRP £339.99). For more info, head to [www.nikon.co.uk](http://www.nikon.co.uk)



# HOW TO ENTER

## AMATEUR COMPETITION

Open to amateur photographers only; free entry. All entrants are deemed to have agreed to be bound by the full terms and conditions at [travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://travelphotooftheyear.co.uk). For further info, call 01753 620426.

### THE CATEGORIES

■ There are four categories in the Amateur competition:

(i) People (ii) Wildlife (iii) Landscape (iv) Travel Icons (classic travel images that sum up a destination).

■ You may enter up to four photos IN TOTAL. This can be across all categories or within selected categories (eg, four shots in one category OR two shots in one, two in another OR one in each, etc). One submission per individual; multiple entries will be disqualified.

### ONLINE ENTRIES

You can submit competition entries for free at [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk)

### POSTAL ENTRIES

You can also submit prints, transparencies and digital images by post. Here's how:

■ Postal entries must be accompanied by the entry form. Photocopies are acceptable.

■ A separate sheet must accompany each entry, with the entrant's name and a brief caption (subject, location) for each photo.

■ If submitting prints, mark the image taker's name on the back (on a label).

■ If you're submitting transparencies, mark the photographer's name on the mount. Duplicates can be sent. The original must be available. Picture orientation should be shown by a dot on the front, bottom-left corner.

■ Prints from digital originals: include a CD (ISO cross-platform Mac/PC) with the original JPEG or RAW files, with all metadata intact. These may be used to check that any alterations made are within our rules. CDs must be clearly labelled with the photographer's name.

■ Do not send negatives – they will be requested if needed.

■ Only entries accompanied by an adequately sized and stamped SAE (stiffened/padded) will be returned.

■ Please tick the box on the form if you'd prefer not to be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Each entry must reflect the theme of travel and be suitable for its category.
2. Images must be high resolution to be printed, without loss of quality, to A3 exhibition standard. As a guideline, your camera will need to be 6MP+ and the image will need to be 300dpi at A3 size.
3. Minor digital adjustments are allowed, such as levels, curves, contrast, colour, saturation and sharpening. However, we are interested in shots that capture the moment, not ones that create it, so the image must still be a faithful representation of the original scene. Composite and multiple exposures are NOT allowed, nor the adding or removing of subjects into or from the image.
4. Black-and-white images may be shot in colour and de-saturated, then have a

duotone or sepia tone applied. These pictures will be judged on their merits.

5. Originals of all entries must be available on request.

### RULES & RESTRICTIONS

1. Photos that have won competitions with a prize exceeding £100 cannot be entered.

2. Employees of *Wanderlust*, *The Independent*, Tourism Western Australia, any additional POTY partners, and regular *Wanderlust* contributors are excluded.

3. Professional photographers are excluded, being defined as any individuals whose primary source of income is from the sale of photos, or who gain part- or full-time employment as a photojournalist.

4. Exclusions: prints larger than A4 (300mm x 210mm); transparencies with glass mounts; entries submitted in tubes; photos that have been manipulated digitally outside of our stated guidelines.

5. The organisers take no responsibility for loss, delay or damage to photos.

### PRIZES & AWARDS

1. Up to ten entries in each category will be displayed for judging at Destinations 2016.

2. The category winners will win a photo commission to Western Australia. Each winner can bring an adult travelling companion. Travel to airport and travel insurance is excluded. Proof of travel insurance will be required. Entrant must meet and provide own valid visa and entry requirements to Australia. Black out dates will apply. For details, see full T&Cs online.

3. Participants must be over 18.

4. Four 'runners up' entrants across the amateur categories will receive a Nikon D5500 + 18-55 VR II lens (RRP £719.99).

5. Four 'highly commended' entrants across the amateur categories will receive a Nikon COOLPIX P610 (RRP £339.99).

6. The winner of the Destinations 2016 visitors vote will receive Nikon School Vouchers (RRP £129).

7. No alternative prizes are available.

8. Winners will be announced at Destinations 2016, London.

9. Prize-winning and commended photos may be reproduced free of charge in both *Wanderlust* and *The Independent*, including their websites, and may be used by any of the sponsors and organisers of the exhibition, without payment, in direct promotional material related to the competition and exhibition only.

10. Copyright of entered photos remains with the photographer. However, the photographer grants the organisers and sponsors non-exclusive rights to free production and exhibition of prize-winning and commended entries but only in direct promotion of and publicity for this competition for up to five years. Where possible, credit will be given.

The full terms & conditions are available at [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk)



# PORTFOLIO COMPETITION

Open to amateur or professional photographers; £10 entry. All entrants are deemed to have agreed to be bound by the full terms and conditions found at [travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://travelphotooftheyear.co.uk). For further info, call 01753 620426.

## CATEGORIES

- There are four categories in the Portfolio competition: (i) People (ii) Wildlife (iii) Landscape (iv) Travel Icons (classic travel images that sum up a destination).
- The portfolio must be themed and reflect one of the categories, working together to create a cohesive portfolio. Pictures will be judged independently and as a set.
- Each submission must consist of a portfolio of five photos in total. Only one entry per individual is allowed.

## ONLINE ENTRIES

You can submit photos to the competition at [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk)

## POSTAL ENTRIES

You can also submit prints, transparencies and digital images by post. The conditions for the portfolio category are the same as the Amateur category (see left hand page):

## ENTRY FEE

- Each Portfolio entry must be accompanied by a fee of £10. Entry fees can be paid online, or by cheque (from a UK bank to Wanderlust Publications Ltd), international money order or credit card.

## ENTRY GUIDELINES

1. Each Portfolio must reflect the theme of travel and be suitable for its category.
2. Acceptable formats: colour or black & white prints from negatives; colour or black & white transparencies (duplicates can be sent providing originals are also available); digital images can be submitted as prints with the original RAW file or JPEG (with all metadata intact) supplied on a CD. Images must be sufficiently high resolution to be printed, without loss of quality, to A3 exhibition standard therefore your image must be A3 proportion, ideally at a minimum of 300dpi.
3. Minor digital adjustments are allowed, such as levels, curves, contrast, colour, saturation and sharpening. However, we want shots that capture the moment, not ones that create it, so the image must still be a faithful representation of what was taken at the time. Composite and multiple exposures are not allowed, nor the adding/removing of subjects into/from the image.
4. Black-and-white images may be shot in colour and de-saturated, then have a duotone or sepia tone applied. These pictures will be judged on their merits.
5. Originals of all entries must be available on request.

## RULES & RESTRICTIONS

1. Entries must be accompanied by an entry form; photocopies are acceptable.
2. Photos that have previously won competitions with a prize exceeding £100 or are currently entered/shortlisted in other travel photo competitions may not be entered.
3. Exclusions: Photos that have been manipulated digitally outside of our stated guidelines.

## PRIZES & AWARDS

1. The overall winner of the Portfolio category will be awarded £3,000.
2. One 'runner up' entrant will receive a Nikon D5500 + 18-55 VR II lens (RRP £719.99).
3. One 'highly commended' entrant will receive a Nikon COOLPIX P610 (RRP £339.99).
4. No alternative prizes are available.
5. Each postal entry that includes a further SAE will receive a free pass for two people to Destinations 2016.
6. Winners announced at Destinations 2016, London.
7. The judges reserve the right to edit a portfolio submission by removing one image of the five if they feel it necessary to strengthen the overall quality of the entry.
8. The judges' decision will be final – no correspondence will be entered into.

The full terms & conditions are available at [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk)

# WANDERLUST TRAVEL PHOTO OF THE YEAR | AMATEUR

Amateur category official entry form (Please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS. Photocopies are acceptable)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

(If retired please also state previous profession) \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime tel no: \_\_\_\_\_

Evening tel no: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

## Where did you first hear about the competition? (please tick)

- ☐ Wanderlust ☐ The Independent ☐ Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

## Please summarise your entries:

| Category                        | No. transparencies | No. prints |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| People                          | _____              | _____      |
| Wildlife                        | _____              | _____      |
| Landscape                       | _____              | _____      |
| Travel Icons                    | _____              | _____      |
| <b>Total (Maximum 4 photos)</b> | _____              | _____      |

- ☐ I confirm that I am not a professional photographer as defined in the terms and conditions of the competition (found on [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk))
- ☐ I agree to be bound by the full conditions of entry (found on [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk))

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Send your entry, with this form, to: Wanderlust (Amateur Photo of the Year), PO Box 1832, Windsor SL4 1YT. Please be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope if you wish your photos to be returned.

☐ Please tick the box if you'd prefer not to be contacted by Wanderlust or the sponsors.

# WANDERLUST TRAVEL PHOTO OF THE YEAR | PORTFOLIO

Portfolio category official entry form (Please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS. Photocopies are acceptable)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

(If retired please also state previous profession) \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime tel no: \_\_\_\_\_

Evening tel no: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

## Where did you first hear about the competition? (please tick)

- ☐ Wanderlust ☐ The Independent ☐ Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

| Please summarise your entries: | No. transparencies | No. prints | Total    |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------|----------|
|                                | _____              | _____      | <b>5</b> |

Portfolio category (circle one): People / Wildlife / Landscape / Travel Icons

## Entry fee (please tick):

- ☐ I enclose a cheque for £10 payable to Wanderlust Publications Ltd, or
- ☐ Please charge my debit/credit card the sum of £10 (NB we do **not** accept American Express)

Card No: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_ Issue no: \_\_\_\_\_ Start date: \_\_\_\_\_ CVV no.: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be bound by the full conditions of entry (found on [www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk))

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Send your entry, with this form, to: Wanderlust (Portfolio of the Year), PO Box 1832, Windsor SL4 1YT. Please be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope if you wish your photos to be returned.

☐ Please tick the box if you'd prefer not to be contacted by Wanderlust or the sponsors.





**Mirror, mirror**  
Fuji reflected in  
Yamanaka Lake – the  
view you *might* get,  
if you're lucky...



Mt Fuji, Japan

A hike up Mount Fuji is the most classic adventure you can have in Japan. Here's how to avoid the crowds, *join* the crowds and snaffle the most precious views

# MOUNT ELUSIVE

WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**







**F**uji is everywhere. Literally everywhere. Well, perhaps not literally, but figuratively its triangular cone seems to permeate every facet of Japanese culture. From the Hokusai print on the front of the Japan Rail card I picked up from the station in Tokyo, to the plates on the souvenir stands in nearby Hakone, to the line drawing on the 1,000 yen note, this 3,776m stratovolcano's seemingly perfectly

symmetrical likeness is practically inescapable.

Funny then that on my arrival into Fuji-Hakone-Izu – the national park in which the great mountain sits – I couldn't see it anywhere. Not an outline, not a cheeky tip peeking from the haze – nothing. I knew where it should be. A poster at the station helpfully pinpointed its location amid a panorama of lakes and peaks, and the taxi driver who took me to the start of my hike gestured to its supposed summit, describing snow-capped majesty and oblique slopes of ash. But all I could see was an endless grey sky.

"At least we can't see how far we have to go," said a fellow walker optimistically as we left the air conditioned comfort of the car and hit the trail, following signs for 'Fuji Summit'.

The first recorded ascent of Fuji was in AD 663 by a monk on a pilgrimage. Back then he would have started his climb from one of the towns at the mountain's base, taking his time to call at temples en route, savouring each moment to reach the high point. But a lot has changed since then. While technically you can still begin lower down at one of the first of Fuji's ten 'stations' (height levels that feature mountain huts as opposed to railway stops), paved roads make it a less attractive prospect. Most people begin instead at one of the four 5th stations, which sit between 1,440m and 2,400m.

## Setting out from Subashiri

We'd decided to start at the 1,930m Subashiri station. From here, there's still a fair amount of ascent to complete compared to hikes from the most popular Yoshida station (2,305m; always busy due to its ample car park and accommodation) and Fujinomiya (2,400m; highest and second most used), but less than the least-favoured, fairly featureless Gotemba (1,400m). Subashiri is also less developed, and after carb-loading and facility-using at the small shop and restaurant we were on our way without any crowds.

After passing through the *torii* gate at a small shrine – where guide Steve advised us to pray for a good climb and good weather – the wide concrete slabbed path faded and we were plunged into a forest





Follow the arrow  
Entering the forest  
on the uncrowded  
Subashiri Trail;  
Komitake Shrine (left)  
on the Yoshida Trail

**‘I turned onto one of the path’s switchbacks and caught sight of blue sky. In just a few steps we’d popped up above the mist and now looked down on a thick bank of cumulus clouds’**

of Japanese hemlocks and Nikko fir trees. Despite the cloud hiding the mountain, it was a hot and humid July day (official climbing season is July-August, when Fuji is usually snow-free and the mountain huts are open) and I was glad of the cover the canopy provided. The air was damp and musky as I clutched the cool, rough bark of a tree trunk to heave myself upwards as the trail became steeper.

With an estimated ascent time of around five hours on this path (and a faster descent of two to three hours), doing Fuji in a single day is certainly possible. But then you’d miss the *goraiko* (the ‘arrival of the light’) at sunrise – the ultimate Fuji spectacle. Therefore most people do the climb in one of two ways: either starting their walk at night and climbing the whole way in the dark to arrive (hopefully) in time for this phenomenon or climb most of the way in the afternoon, rest for the night in a mountain hut, and climb the final few hundred metres before dawn. With no eagerness to stumble around the

mountain tired and view-less with the real potential of getting lost, I opted for the latter.

And so I continued to plod, slowly but steadily, on the increasingly rocky Subashiri Trail, knowing that in a few hours I would be able to rest and eat just 376m below the mountaintop.

## Footsteps up Fuji

Fuji’s volcanic nature soon became clear as we emerged from the forest and onto crumbling ashen cliffs, black and biscuit-like. At the 6th station I reached my first hut and felt around to the side of my pack to grab the small wooden stick I’d bought at the start. For a small fee this baton could be branded with a stamp at each station, providing a pole passport of your journey. It was supposed to act as a memento to prove you’d made it right the way to the top, but for me it soon became a goal to spur me on – a job to tick off the list; ►



# Mt Fuji, Japan

◀ just two more stamps and I'll be able to rest. The scent of burning wood was satisfying; I stashed my freshly marked stick back in my rucksack and continued on.

Until this point my one constant had been the cloud, concealing any views of the summit like a restrictive but nonetheless comforting blanket. So it was with shock that I turned onto one of the path's switchbacks a few minutes later and caught sight of blue sky. In just a few steps we had emerged from the clag, popped up above the mist and now looked down on a thick bank of cumulus clouds.

By the time I reached the next hut, the next stamp and the next toilet, the sun and the price of a can of cola had all increased. I sipped my drink watching the azures above me give way to purple, while a smiling Japanese woman branded my walking stick with a hot iron.

Women didn't used to be allowed on this mountain at all. Fuji was believed to be the home of a fire goddess who, out of jealousy, would spew molten lava towards members of her own sex. Thankfully she has seemingly mellowed – the last eruption was in 1707-8 and women have been treading her pathways in their thousands since 1868. I met at least a hundred of them not long after the hut, when the Subashiri pathway joined with the busy Yoshida Trail at 3,380m. For the last section of the hike to Hon Hachigome Tomoekan hut (3,400m), the pockets of people became giant clusters, all looking nervously at the summit above, which appeared as a long stretch of steep slope yawning ever upwards.

Inside the hut, a supper of meat curry and rice (oddly, with a burger on the side) awaited. There were also turnstile toilets that set you back ¥200 (£1) a visit and giant bunkbeds where we'd all be sleeping sardine style – the price of climbing the highest mountain in the country. I didn't rush in; instead I stood outside on the balcony,

which was precariously cleaved into the sharp rocky slope, and stared in awe as I noticed a pointed silhouette stretch out onto the clouds below – my first glimpse of Fuji.

## Japan's greatest high

Despite wearing earplugs, movement from the opposite bunks woke me at 2am. Sunrise wasn't until just before 5am, but some people were taking no chances. I tried to doze for a little longer but finally, at 3am, with nearly every other walker stirring and lights being switched on, it became impossible.

Sleepily I dressed and bundled my belongings into my bag. I emerged outside to be hit with the chill of pre-dawn air, but it wasn't just the temperature that took my breath away. As I looked down the mountain, a giant neon caterpillar seemed to be making its way up. Headtorches, flashlights and glowsticks cut through the darkness like Christmas lights. Behind me, Yamabushi monks began to chant while other walkers shook bells and talked excitedly.

"I'll see you at the top," I called to Steve as I was swept up into the torchlit conga weaving its way uphill. I had dreaded the thought of the crowds but, in a funny way, the mass of people became part of the event. People helped each other negotiate steeper passages, and the strobing lights lent a festival vibe to proceedings. As we hit the 9th station and the white torii gate, just metres from the volcanic crater rim, the chanting monks got louder. Suddenly the bottleneck escaped the narrow trail passage and I was released onto the summit ridge in front of the Kusushi Shrine where the final stamp awaited.

I had done it in good time – sunset was still a good 45 minutes away and now, out of the embrace of the throng, I shivered. Rather bizarrely, at this point of the circular rim sits a cluster of shops, ►

**On a high**  
Rising above the  
clouds, crowds  
and mountain huts  
at sunset

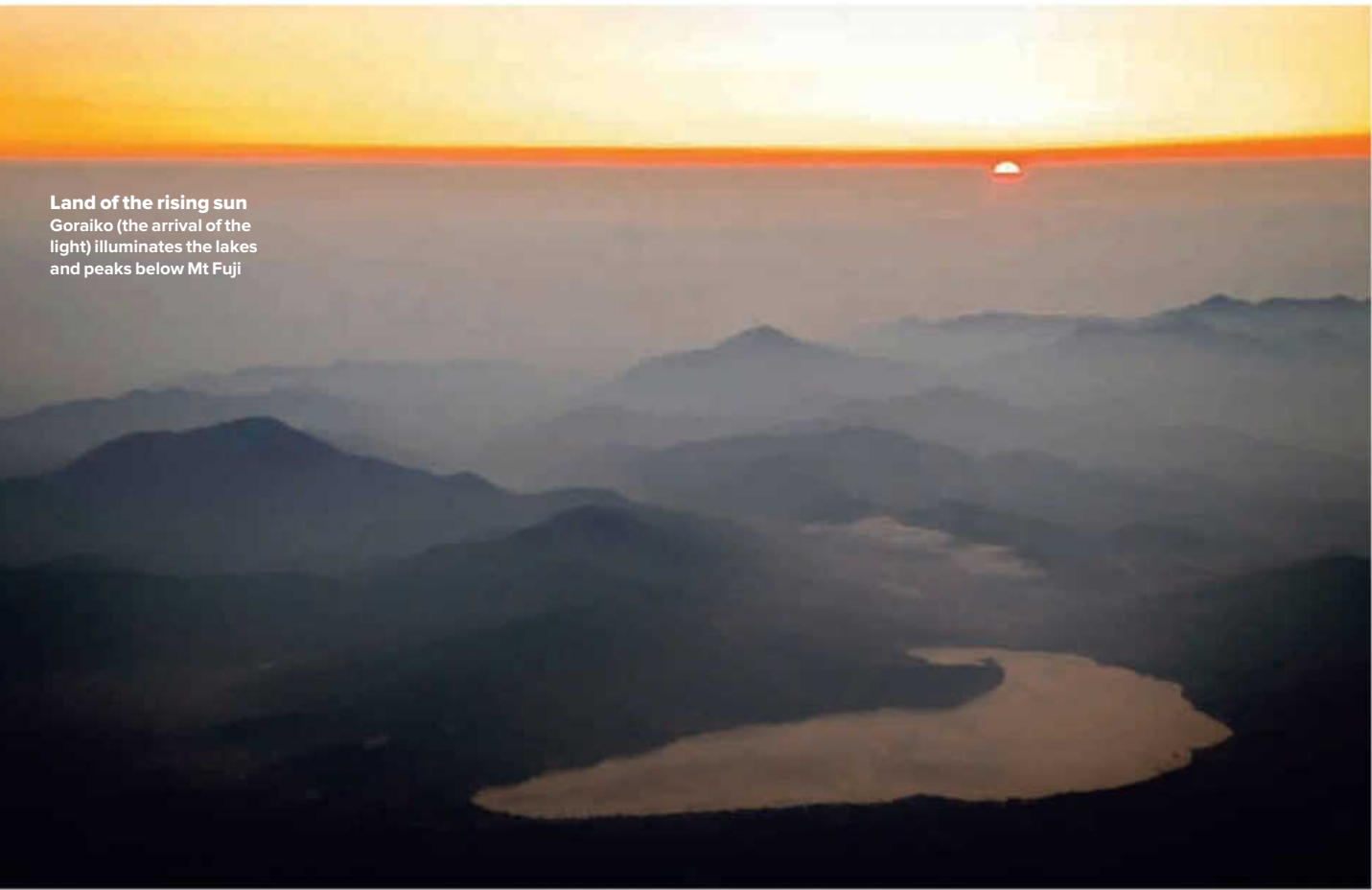




**Summit success**  
(clockwise from this)  
Snow clings to Mount  
Fuji's central crater;  
dawn light illuminates  
the *torii* gate at the  
crater rim; getting your  
walking stick branded  
is a great souvenir







**Land of the rising sun**  
Goraiko (the arrival of the light) illuminates the lakes and peaks below Mt Fuji

**‘A glow appeared on the horizon, barely a tangerine smudge. Then it began to grow, appearing as a thin line, then a perfectly round orb, intensifying, expanding, lifting’**

◀ whose owners were madly scrambling to open and showcase their wares to the first wave of arrivals. At first I was unsure what to make of the scenario – being greeted by a raft of vending machines wasn’t something I’d expected atop Japan’s highest peak. But my thirst quickly gave in and I too joined the line to grab a coffee.

### Sunrise strolls

The top of Fuji is a circular rim around the volcanic crater. Most summiteers grab a bench, watch sunrise and then descend, but I was determined to complete the hour-long circuit on the Ohachimeguri Trail around the rim. Warming my hands on my hot drink, I continued on the path to find a spot away from the other walkers bunched near the arrival point. With the key moment imminent, I sat in silent contemplation, watching the dance of the never-ending headtorches still streaming up from below.

A few minutes before 5am a glow appeared on the horizon, barely a tangerine smudge. Then it began to grow, appearing as a thin line, then a perfectly round orb, intensifying, expanding, lifting. Cheers began to sound from every direction; people hugged, smartphones snapped. The rocks around me turned red as the sunlight broke through the darkness – goraiko had come.

Reunited with Steve, we celebrated our good weather fortune by continuing along the crater’s pathway, while many groups opted to

begin the descent. We passed the post office (I certainly don’t envy the person who has Fuji summit on their round), and spotted each of the five lakes that surround the mountain’s base, barely distinguishable beneath a thin film of haze. Finally we reached it – Kengamine Peak, the mountain’s highest point, the true top.

Passing alongside the now automated weather station, which until its closure in 2004 was manned for 72 years to detect typhoons, I stood triumphantly at the summit marker, a simple granite post engraved with Japanese *kanji* (characters) proclaiming it as Fuji’s tip.

Now in full daylight, we walked towards the path that would take us back down the mountain. However, before I left the summit I took one last gaze out at the Kanto plain below. Stretching out over the green was the perfectly symmetrical shadow of Fuji, making its mark on the country below.

It would be the last time I saw the mountain’s profile on my visit. Cloud drifted in not long after and I never did catch a proper view of it – not from my run down Osunabashiri (the ash-covered path that allows what takes hours to climb to be descended in merely 30 minutes); not from the taxi that picked me up at Subashiri Station; not from my hotel at Hakone. But though I never got to see that famous postcard view from the ground, I didn’t care. The silhouette of Fuji I witnessed from the summit was stained on my soul, perfectly symmetrical and forever inescapable. 📷



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*Wanderlust*

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# 12 MUST CLIMB PEAKS

Inspired by  
Fuji? Then  
try tackling one  
of these other  
top trekking  
summits

## 1 TOUBKAL, MOROCCO

**HEIGHT:** 4,167m

**CLIMB TIME:** 2-3 days round trip

**ROUTE:** Imil village – Around – Refuge du Toubkal/ Neltner Hut (overnight) – Summit

**DIFFICULTY:** 4; non-technical but rough paths and scree, plus risk of altitude sickness

♦ Just a 90-minute drive from the souks of Marrakech stands this snow-capped giant – North Africa's highest. Hire a guide, mules and muleteer in Imil before hiking through Berber villages to reach the refuge at 3,207m, from where you'll head to the summit.

## 3 KALA PATTAR, NEPAL

**HEIGHT:** 5,643m

**CLIMB TIME:** 9-12 days round trip

**ROUTE:** Lukla – Gorak Shep – Summit

**DIFFICULTY:** 5; technically easy but access is via a long, multi-day trek at high altitude

♦ For the ultimate view of Everest, ascend Kala Pattar. A favourite stop-off on most Base Camp Treks, it's one of the highest Himalayan points you can summit without specialist skills. It's a slow, oxygen-thin two-hour walk from Gorak Shep (near Everest Base Camp), but the views more than make up for the effort.

## 5 HALF DOME, CALIFORNIA, USA

**HEIGHT:** 2,694m

**CLIMB TIME:** 12 hours round trip

**ROUTE:** From Happy Isles shuttle stop

**DIFFICULTY:** 3; last section requires secured cables and a head for heights

♦ This Yosemite icon, the poster child of the national park, is no push over. Reaching its summit requires a 25km walk in wild country, and thunderstorms are common. Also, the final 120m is a near-vertical haul up fixed cables. Your reward? Panoramic views of the Yosemite valley and High Sierra range.

## 2 KILIMANJARO, TANZANIA

**HEIGHT:** 5,895m

**CLIMB:** 5-10 days round trip (depending on route/acclimatisation days allowed)

**ROUTE:** Six main routes: Shira, Lemosho, Machame, Umbwe, Marangu, Rongai

**DIFFICULTY:** 5; non-technical but high altitude

♦ Africa's highest is a snow-capped behemoth, gazing down on the wildlife-strewn plains. It's the world's highest non-technical mountain but the altitude makes this a hefty challenge. Guides are mandatory. Acclimatisation is key: choose an itinerary that allows your body time to adapt.

## 4 JEBEL UM ADAAMI, JORDAN

**HEIGHT:** 1,832m

**CLIMB TIME:** 3-4 hours round trip

**ROUTE:** From Wadi Rum (on Saudi border)

**DIFFICULTY:** 2; heat is the main challenge

♦ On the southern edge of the sandy plains and rocky jebels of Wadi Rum sits the splintered slopes of Jordan's highest mountain. Hire a Bedouin guide at the visitor centre in Wadi Rum village; they will take you via 4WD to the base of this peak. It's best climbed early in the morning to escape the heat, but from the top you can peer down on Saudi Arabia.

## 6 TABLE MOUNTAIN, SOUTH AFRICA

**HEIGHT:** 1,086m

**CLIMB TIME:** 1-3 hours one way

**ROUTE:** Various, including Platteklip Gorge

**DIFFICULTY:** 1; simple, though quite rugged and steep; watch for snakes

♦ Flat-topped, and often cloaked in a tablecloth of low-lying cloud, Cape Town's high point is a handsome hiking prospect. Rather than taking the cable car, start at Tafelberg Road and trek up, up, up through the Platteklip Gorge (the most direct route). Be sure to hit Maclear's Beacon, the highest point on the summit plateau.





## 7 MOUNT KINABALU, BORNEO

**HEIGHT:** 4,095m

**CLIMB TIME:** 1-2 days round trip

**ROUTE:** From Timpohon Gate

**DIFFICULTY:** 4; high altitude

◆ Despite making headlines after the antics of a few naked climbers, Kinabalu remains a serious hiking proposition. The trek leads up from Alpine meadows, via a wealth of wildlife (prolific plants and over 300 species of birds). Split the ascent by overnighing at the Laban Rata resthouse (3,270m), before summiting the next morning. Just leave your clothes on...

## 8 PACAYA, GUATEMALA

**HEIGHT:** 2,552m

**CLIMB TIME:** 4-5 hours round trip

**ROUTE:** From San Vicente

**DIFFICULTY:** 3; steep climb on mud, sand and rock; active volcano – heed eruption warnings

◆ Ascending this very active volcano involves around two hours of straight up. It's tough going, on testing terrain (though it is possible to take a horse instead), but the rewards are fine views and close-ups of hissing heat vents and lava flows, where you can toast marshmallows to celebrate your success.

## 9 PICO, AZORES

**HEIGHT:** 2,351m

**CLIMB TIME:** 3-4 hours one way

**ROUTE:** From Cabeço das Cabras

**DIFFICULTY:** 2; technically easy but steep scramble at the crater

◆ A well-marked trail from the visitor centre at Cabeço das Cabras leads up Portugal's highest peak. It's a steep hike through dense forest and then over lava rock to reach the crater; from here it's tougher going to summit the cone that sits within. A crack at the top spits out steam but don't worry: it hasn't erupted since 1718.

## 10 COTOPAXI, ECUADOR

**HEIGHT:** 5,897m

**CLIMB TIME:** 7-10 hours one way

**ROUTE:** Car park (4,600m) – Refugio Jose Rivas (4,800m) – summit

**DIFFICULTY:** 5; physically demanding and very high; can be icy – some technical skills required

◆ An hour from Quito, Cotopaxi – one of the world's highest active volcanoes – sits amid the forest and páramo of its namesake national park. It's a tough climb: a guide is mandatory, acclimatisation essential, crampons and ice axes required. But the views are out of this world.

## 11 MONT BLANC, FRANCE/ITALY

**HEIGHT:** 4,810m

**CLIMB TIME:** 2 days round trip

**ROUTE:** Voie des Cristalliers (French side), via the Gouter Refuge (3,817m)

**DIFFICULTY:** 5; technical skills and high fitness levels required; bad weather common

◆ The highest mountain in the Alps, Mount Blanc calls to climbers. But it's not a simple peak to bag, and some technical nous is needed to navigate its glaciers and infamous Grand Couloir (where rockfalls are common). However, a good guide can get fit novices on top.

## 12 KOSCIUSZKO, AUSTRALIA

**HEIGHT:** 2,228m

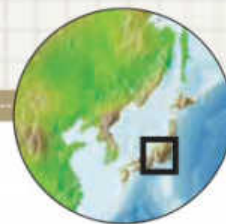
**CLIMB TIME:** 4-6 hours round trip

**ROUTE:** From Thredbo chairlift

**DIFFICULTY:** 1; simple; high winds possible

◆ Australia's highest peak is an easy, pleasant hike. However, while most people trek up and down it in one day, consider spending more time in Kosciuszko National Park. Camp among the meadows, lakes and rare mountain pygmy possums of Wilkinson Valley – a lovely spot, with the added bonus of giving you a crowd-beating headstart to Kosciuszko's summit.





# Mount Fuji, Japan Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Nearest cities:** Gotemba (east), Fujiyoshida (north), Fujinomiya (south)  
**Populations:** 88,000 (Gotemba); 50,000 (Fujiyoshida); 132,000 (Fujinomiya)  
**Languages:** Japanese; English is usually understood and spoken  
**Time:** GMT+9  
**International dialling code:** +81  
**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals  
**Money:** Yen (¥), currently around ¥190 to the UK£. Take cash for use in the huts: credit cards are not accepted and there are no ATMs available on the mountain or in the huts.

## When to go

|     |     |      |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Jan | Feb | Mar  | Apr | May | Jun |
| Jul | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |

■ **Official climbing season.** Public buses operate between Tokyo and the lower stations, all of the mountain huts are open and weather is at its best. Avoid Obon Week (mid August) as it will be busy with holiday crowds.

■ **Shoulder season.** Depending on the weather, some huts open until mid-September. There are fewer people, but facilities are reduced. The weather can be more changeable.

■ **Snow season.** Extreme weather: wind, ice, snow; avalanches are a risk. No huts are open, very few facilities (if any) are on offer. Only recommended for very experienced mountaineers.

## Health & safety

Comprehensive **travel insurance** is essential; ensure your policy covers trekking up to altitudes of 3,776m (wanderlustinsurance.co.uk). Take **plenty of water** – or enough money to buy more if you run out!

## Further reading & information

**Japan** (Rough Guides, 2014)  
**Japan** (Lonely Planet, 2013)  
[www.jnto.go.jp](http://www.jnto.go.jp) Japan National Tourism Organization

## More online

Visit [www.wanderlust.co.uk/159](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/159) for links to more content:

### ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ Japan on the cheap – issue 80
  - ◆ First 24 hours in Tokyo – issue 114
- ### PLANNING GUIDES
- ◆ Japan Travel Guide

## THE TRIP

**i** The author travelled with **Inside Japan** (0117 244 3263, [insidejapantours.com](http://insidejapantours.com)) on its 14-day *Historic Mountain Trails* trip. It includes a section of the Nakasendo Highway with a stay in a ryokan, an ascent of Oku-hotaka, stays in Tokyo, Matsumoto and Kyoto, a guided ascent of Mt Fuji, all accommodation, internal travel and some food. Prices from £2,100pp.

## Getting there & around

Several airlines **fly direct to Japan** from the UK. Flight time is around 12 hours; returns cost from £800.

In climbing season **buses** run daily from Shinjuku (Tokyo) and Meitetsu (Nagoya) to the start of the **Yoshida Trail** (Kawaguchiko or Fuji Subaru 5th Station). Fares cost from ¥2,700 (£14) one way; travel time 2.5hrs from Tokyo, 4.5hrs from Nagoya. Booking advised.

To access the other 5th stations, you can take the bus as above, then a taxi; however, this is expensive (from ¥12,000 (£63)). Alternatively, do the following:

For **Fujinomiya**, take the shinkansen train (covered by a Japan Rail pass) from Tokyo to Shin-Fuji (75mins), then the bus to Fujinomiya 5th Station (¥2,380 (£12.50) one way; 2hrs)

For **Subashiri**, take the train from Tokyo to Kozu, then Gotemba (covered by a JR pass; 2hrs), then take the bus to Subashiri (¥1,540 (£8) one way; 1hr).

For **Gotemba**, travel to Gotemba as above, then take the bus to Gotemba 5th Station (¥1,100 (£6) one way; 40mins).

**Be sure to take the correct route back down.** It's possible to confuse the Yoshida and Subashiri routes on the



Virtual reality  
Mt Fuji casts a  
mighty shadow

descent – and getting from one station to the other requires a four-hour bus ride or an expensive taxi (¥20,000+ (£105)).

Note, roads to the 5th stations are closed to private transport in climbing season – only taxis or shuttlebuses can be used. For up-to-date timetables, see [www.japan-guide.com](http://www.japan-guide.com).

## Accommodation

Remember that **Mountain huts** on Mount Fuji book up fast, especially at peak times. The higher huts fill first. Expect to pay ¥5,000-7,000ppn (£26-37), which usually includes an evening meal. It's bad etiquette to arrive late – aim to be there by 8pm; food usually stops being served after 9pm. **Boots must be removed** inside the huts and replaced with slippers (these are provided).

Unless organised via a tour operator (recommended), the only way to book the huts is to call them. Location info and contact details can be found on the Japan National Tourism Organization website via [tinyurl.com/fujihuts](http://tinyurl.com/fujihuts).

## Food & drink

Hut meals are pricey and bland. Vegetarians will struggle. **Stock up on snacks before your climb.** Everything gets more expensive the higher you go – expect to pay ¥200 (£1) for a can of cola at the 5th station but ¥500 (£2.60) on the summit. A hut meal costs around ¥1,000 (£5.20). Bottles of water cost ¥400 (£2). Take change for the vending machines.

## What to take

Mountains weather can be **unpredictable and change very quickly**. Pack a hat (for warmth and for protection from the sun), gloves, a buff (useful on the ashen descent paths) and **lots of layers**: baselayers (made of wicking fabrics), a midlayer (fleece) and waterproofs (jacket and overtrousers) as well as a warm duvet jacket to wear over everything while you're waiting for sunrise. **Take good walking boots**, and break them in before your trip; also take proper walking socks. Don't forget a headtorch for the pre-dawn walk to the summit. You'll need a sleeping bag for the huts, and ear plugs too.

## FUJI: ROUTES TO THE TOP

### Gotemba Trail

Has the most ascent of all the trails and is fairly featureless, making it the least popular of the four

### Fujinomiya Trail

Starts from the highest elevation meaning the least climb to the summit – second most popular trail

### Yoshida Trail

Starts at the second highest elevation and has a large car park and many shops at the start, making it the most popular route to the top

### Subashiri Trail

Starts further down the mountain than Yoshida and Fujinomiya, but is less developed and so much less crowded than other trails





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# FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

**T**he taxi's engine hummed in the cold mountain air. I stood and wondered if I'd be OK with the altitude; not for the first time that day, my heart started to race.

The driver had pulled over to let me relieve myself and I was now seriously doubting what we'd let ourselves in for. A dark lake lay below me, reflecting my mood, its surface rippled by the keen winds whipping off the high peaks to the north. We were already at 4,000m and still had a way to go to the trailhead at La Cumbre, almost 1,000m higher up the road. I jumped back in the passenger seat of the ageing car we'd hailed back in La Paz and we started to climb the last few kilometres to the pass.

We'd opted to kill two birds with one stone and hike down from the heights of the Cordillera Real to Coroico, experiencing one of Bolivia's most beautiful treks along paved pre-Columbian Inca roads while avoiding a section of highway popularly known as 'the world's most dangerous road'. It had won this accolade on account of its regular fatal accidents, usually involving buses going off the edge and plummeting several thousand feet to the valley floor. There was, of course, the option of tearing down said road on a bike but the idea of missing out on the superlative scenery as it whipped by in a blur surrounded by a bunch of adrenalin junkies didn't sound appealing, so my girlfriend and I had chosen the trek.

At the pass the taxi pulled away, made a U-turn and began its descent back down to the capital. We were alone with not a living thing in sight. Barren brown treeless slopes punctuated with shrinking patches of snow

■ Your Story

## An alternative Inca Trail

Forget Peru – reader **Daniel Davies-Llewellyn** follows Bolivia's Inca pathways for a hike without the hordes



and ice surrounded us, while billowing cloud blown up from the lowlands swirled and danced. The air was thin and as we set off we were finding it difficult to catch our breath. At 4,700m this was the highest we'd ever been but thankfully the telltale signs of altitude sickness had not kicked in.

We made our way to a ranger hut about 500m from the road and signed the logbook. As we scrawled our names and details on the crumpled page I had the feeling I was signing out of the known world and about to embark on a journey into the unfamiliar, the 'other'. Two couples and their guides had signed out in the past few days but that was it; the crowds that flocked to the Inca Trail and Machu Picchu were, for the moment at least, far, far away. The feeling of walking into the unknown was further compounded by the fact we'd chosen to do this alone, without a guide, in an attempt to embrace wholeheartedly the spirit of adventure. There would be no hostels or guesthouses, no electricity or running water. For the next three days we were on our own with only the things we carried on our backs.

Looking back, the most physically demanding part of the 70km we covered was that first climb up from La Cumbre to Abra Chucura, a small notch in the hillside above us at almost 5,000m. The wending 2km track, taking us over stony ground and between small ponds, took at least an hour as our overworked lungs and thumping hearts did their best to carry us up to the highest point on our trek. It was cold and the wind was biting at our faces. On the way we passed a small shrine where some locals were making offerings of alcohol and



cigarettes to Pachamama, the goddess revered by the indigenous people of the Andes. As I made eye contact with one of the men and nodded a “*buenos días*” he passed me a bottle of what was near pure alcohol to make our own offering to the gods. In light of what we were doing it seemed like a good idea to partake in the ceremony. Bidding our farewells, we eventually made it to Abra Chucura, at the watershed of the mighty Andes. From here it was downhill all the way to the Amazon Basin.

In Inca times the route that lay ahead was one of three important highways connecting the *altiplano* – a high plateau that covers almost half of all Bolivia – to the lower subtropical region known as Las Yungas. It's generally thought that the rock pavements, drainage channels and enclosed walls here are more impressive than similar roads in Peru. Also, these roads are known to have been in existence even before the conquest of the region by the Incas. I stood and pondered: how many people had walked these flagstones over the centuries?

## Liquidity issues

The next few hours were incredible. Mile upon mile of ancient paving dropped out of the mountains as we lost altitude. We passed llama farmers driving their stock up from the valleys below to market in La Paz. Later, a lone man passed us with a huge beam of wood attached to his head with a rope, presumably for a building project. As we went through small settlements children would run out to greet us, smiling through their grubby faces and tattered clothes.

This was a land completely cut off from the outside world. Self-sufficiency was key to survival here, with anything else having to be brought in on foot or by mule. The landscape was changing too – bare rock was turning to tufts of tough grass that in turn morphed into pasture. As morning turned into afternoon, we spotted our first tree. Birdsong met us on the wind and before long we were walking through woods with the sounds of water gurgling as it tumbled alongside us.

By late afternoon we'd reached the 2,825m-high hamlet of Challapampa. We pitched our tiny tent next to the river and soon turned in, exhausted.

Dawn arrived with the sound of a roaring river and birds chattering; the air was still and chilly. We packed away our things, gobbled down cereal bars and set off on a day that was to involve ten hours of hard walking. The first two saw us slipping and sliding down the paved pre-Columbian road

### Secret slopes

The Bolivian Inca Trail from La Cumbre sees far fewer people than its Peruvian namesake



that ran alongside the Rio Chucura to Choro, an idyllic collection of thatched adobe houses huddled on steep, narrow terraces cut into the mountainside. The air was humid and the vegetation was a vivid green, but we were both sweating and losing liquid fast.

We left Choro, crossing its wooden slatted suspension bridge to turn east where the Rio Chucura met the Tiquimani. The trail now entered a section of dense vegetation where water was scarce. We were starting to get hungry but our supplies were low. We had to make do with a packet of biscuits between us for the remainder of the day, and we collected and purified water whenever the track dropped down to cross a tributary. We wound along the valley-side keeping more or less to the 2,000m contour line with regular descents and climbs out of gullies and gorges, fording their respective watercourses. In the afternoon we passed through the tiny hamlets of San Francisco and Buena Vista where dogs nipped at our ankles and chickens roamed free.

People greeted us as we passed their straw houses. Hummingbirds hovered, a sure sign that we were entering a more tropical climate. The light faded, our torches came out and we pushed our way through long head-high grasses wondering if we'd ever make it to our destination for our night's stop. We finally made it in the deep darkness and pitched our tent.

## Peak peeks

I'll never forget the view I unzipped from our tent that morning. Layer upon layer of lush green, forested mountainside backed by a few more layers of serrated sierras and finally, looming over everything at what seemed like the back of the sky, the glacier-cloaked 6,000m-plus peak of Huayna Potosí.

The rising sun behind us lit up each part of the scene in succession before hitting our tent and enticing us out for our breakfast of yet more biscuits. It got hot quick. Before long we were on the move once more and descending to the village of Chairó, the main road and civilisation.

Hitching a ride proved to be incredibly easy and within ten minutes of our arrival in the village we were bouncing and bumping our way along the dirt track that followed the valley floor to Coroico in the back of a pick-up that had seen better days. Sat on my backpack I reflected on the past three days. We'd avoided a bus ride from hell, yes, but we'd also done so much more. We'd found a pocket of Bolivia that most travellers would never experience, seeing things at a slower pace. This had been different. This had been real. I'd looked deep into the eyes of the country. I'd tasted what it really means to travel and I wanted more.

Have you got a travel tale to tell? Post it at [wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust](http://wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust) ►



■ Readers' Pictures

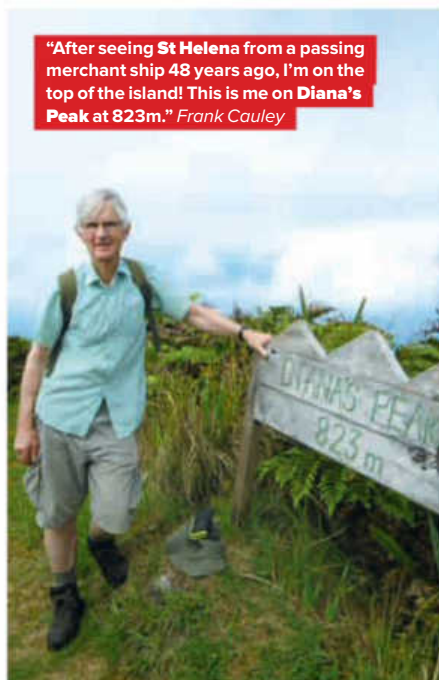
# YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email [fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk) – make us jealous!



**"Stunning view of Bacuit Bay from Lagen Island in Palawan, Philippines."**  
*Simon J Dunbar*



**"After seeing St Helena from a passing merchant ship 48 years ago, I'm on the top of the island! This is me on Diana's Peak at 823m."**  
*Frank Cauley*



**"Shikara ride on Lake Dal, Srinagar, Kashmir."**  
*Louise and Charles Markus*





"The **Acropolis** dominates **Athens'** horizon. It is as if you cannot get enough of it."  
Nandini Chakraborty



"Taking a well earned break on our descent from **Ben Nevis**. It was my second time climbing Ben Nevis and my husband's first – I enjoyed the first climb so much that I wanted to share the experience!" Kelly-Marie Smith

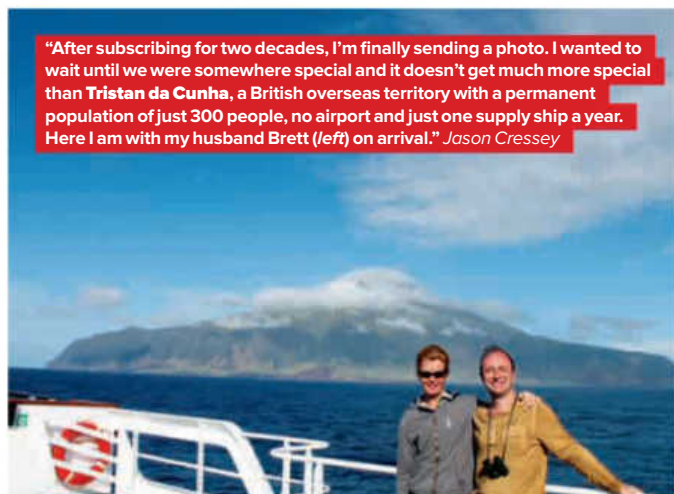
## Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **High UV with Insect Shield Buff®** – the ultimate travel accessory (RRP £21). But can you do better than Kelly-Marie (above)? We want to see where your *Wanderlust* takes you and where you take your *Wanderlust*!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag, email it to [fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk) or hashtag it #wanderlustmag on Instagram.



"Hippos watching me, as I explore **Swaziland's** game parks by mountain bike, vehicle and on foot." Jane Baxter



"After subscribing for two decades, I'm finally sending a photo. I wanted to wait until we were somewhere special and it doesn't get much more special than **Tristan da Cunha**, a British overseas territory with a permanent population of just 300 people, no airport and just one supply ship a year. Here I am with my husband Brett (left) on arrival." Jason Cressey





# LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, naked riding, an unforgettable elephant, the joys of Japan, wild Scotland, making it across Mongolia



## ◀ Elephant memory

The game warden Bill Woodley, who is mentioned in 'The Ivory Tower' article [*Wanderlust*, June/July 2015, issue 157], was a good friend of mine; his wife and his boys stayed with me. Bill was always busy out on patrol catching poachers; flying in a Super Cub plane, it was also his job to guide the helicopter to rescue sites around Mount Kenya. He knew the mountain like the back of his hand.

On one occasion I was staying with the family, and a baby elephant – about 3ft 6in at the shoulder – was brought in as she was being attacked by locals. The elephant, called Maragwa, was given a 24-hour guard. An English horse vet living in Nairobi with his wife was brought to see if he could do anything for her.

Maragwa came through an operation, and had drainage tubes splinted to her forelegs. I remember staying with Ruth and Bill after the operation. I flew in the Super Cub; it was an interesting perspective from which to see the movements of the animals. I found myself having to clean Maragwa's wounds and give the prescribed injections. Maragwa recovered and lived for three years.

It was not for a long time that I learned she had stumbled badly, damaged her good foreleg and had to be put to rest. So, *Wanderlust* has stirred all these memories of that brave little elephant that I had grown to love, all those years ago.

*Daphne Juniper, via email*

## ★ STAR LETTER ★

### Biking in the buff

In the August issue of *Wanderlust*, I was interested to read Rachelle Meilleur say [in response to the recent nakedness on Mount Kinabalu] that: 'Would we be accepting if tourists posed naked in front of Buckingham Palace?'. She obviously missed the London Naked Bike Ride on the afternoon of 13 June (the Queen's official birthday – probably a coincidence?). Unfortunately there is no evidence of anyone peeking from behind the curtains. I am not sure how many of the riders were tourists, but there was plenty of evidence to show that tourists enjoyed the event!

*Bruce Lloyd, via email*



## Scotland's wild frontier

It was nice to see the North West Highlands up there in your *13 Wildest Frontiers* [August 2015, issue 158]. You wouldn't think anywhere in the UK could be a 'wild frontier', so it's a pleasant surprise. I haven't been yet, but will certainly make it there sometime soon.

I was surprised to see Chad in there for some reason. I've been fascinated by the country for as long as I can remember, but with the advice that we shouldn't really travel there, I won't be visiting anytime soon. Fascinated to read that *Wanderlust* gets feedback on it every year – I'd love to hear more about that!

*Mark Chadwick, via wanderlust.co.uk*

## Rugged Romania

I've been to two of *Wanderlust's 13 Wildest Frontiers* [issue 158]: the Carpathian Mountains and the North West Highlands. Both keep calling me back.

I've been to the Carpathians three times. One highlight was seeing a family of wild bears with two little cubs coming out of the forest and foraging in the bins – and there are a number of picturesque little towns set in wild mountain forest scenery.

The northwest of Scotland gets my vote as the most beautiful place on earth. The beaches are out of this world. The sea is very cold for swimming but I just about managed it. It's what you'd call bracing! I love it.

*Steve Fryer, via wanderlust.co.uk*

## WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our star contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Bruce!





## Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



**Japan**  
Wanderlust.co.uk  
forum user  
Sophie Carr  
relives her 12-day  
Japanese journey

**The highlight:** The food – so varied and often weird, but almost always delicious.

**Must see:** So many! Visit the temples of Kyoto, explore different neighbourhoods in Tokyo, go to see the snow monkeys and visit craft beer bars in Osaka.

**Top tip:** Explore! Spend as long as possible there. Try the different foods in Hiroshima, Osaka, Tokyo and Kyoto.

**Cautionary tale:** Drinking in the



cities isn't cheap. Lots of bars have cover charges (¥300-500 [£1.50-2.50]). Japanese whisky is amazing but pricey.

**I wish I'd known...** How cool Osaka is. It's often overlooked by tourists, but the food and drink scene is quite something.

**Anything else?** There are wonderful places to eat and drink; lovely shrines and mountains; friendly, crazy people and weirdness everywhere. I just love it!

## This month you have been mostly...

**W** Travelling impulsively – exploring Easter Island with no particular plan or agenda. *Jill24*

**T** Thinking about Asian adventures in China. I would go back to Chengdu for a quick trip if I could afford it! Loved seeing the pandas and the opera in 2012.

*@coastalspc*

**W** Discovering the secret treasures of the rainforest.

Many of them remain hidden – apart from the buggers that bite! *Rhoda1*

**f** Seeking adventure through the epic Mongol Rally. We drove a 1.2L Vauxhall Corsa 8,000 miles over 27 days and through 13 countries in one journey! *Kev Robson*

**T** Looking to Wanderlust for trip inspiration. Long been

thinking of a trip to the Guianas, now I've got a plan thanks to you. Just got to decide when!

*@juliamhammond*

**f** Dreaming of cycling around the beautiful Loire Valley in France. I am so keen!

*Anne-Lise Stewart*

**T** Learning a language on my gap year. A year in Italy: a little effort goes a very long way!

*@JenBrown166*

**W** Trying to stay safe on Peru's roads. Driving is a challenge at the best of times – try riding a motorbike through Peru. The roads are tortuous, the drivers are the torturers but the scenery is sensational. *marksgone*

## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

**Golden moment –  
Dome of the Rock, Israel**  
*Claire Thomas*

Although it's one of the most contentious plots of land on the planet, the Temple Mount area in Old Jerusalem is an impressive sight and an oasis of calm in a busy, often crowded city.

In this picture the iconic Dome of the Rock is framed by beautiful arched columns known as the Scales of Souls – this is where Muslims believe the souls of men will be weighed on the Day of Judgment. I waited some time to take a photo without too many people in the frame; I was happy when this Muslim woman appeared, adding a human element to the image.



**TALK TO US:** Online at [www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust). **Email** [fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk). **Mail** Wanderlust, 1 Leworth Place, Windsor SL4 1EB. **Twitter** @wanderlustmag **Facebook** [www.facebook.com/wanderlusttravelmagazine](http://www.facebook.com/wanderlusttravelmagazine) **Instagram** @wanderlustmag



## Tobago



**Real humdinger**  
The ruby topaz is  
one of six species  
of hummingbird  
that can be seen  
on Tobago





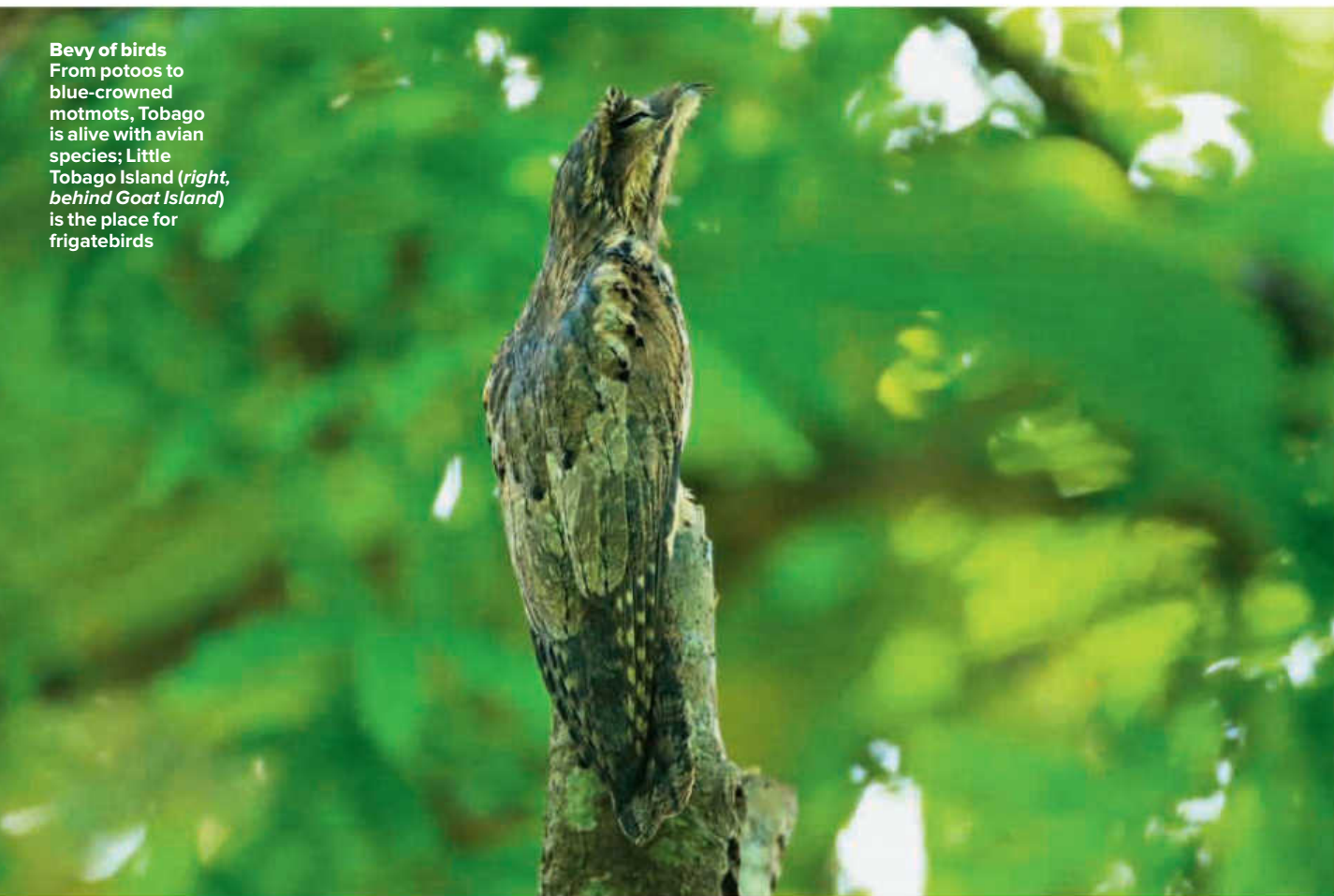
# THE FLIGHT FANTASTIC

You don't have to be a twitcher to fall for the bountiful birds of Tobago, or for their jungly, rugged and unspoilt Caribbean island home

WORDS **SARAH BAXTER**



**Bevy of birds**  
From potoos to blue-crowned motmots, Tobago is alive with avian species; Little Tobago Island (right, behind Goat Island) is the place for frigatebirds



**W**

hile I heard the din of the whole forest orchestra, Newton heard every instrument. We both stood amid the drapery of noisy green: to me it was a compound call of Caribbean nature; for Tobago's best

birder, each chirp arrived as a separate wave, distinct and discernible from the next. My eyes were no better. I caught blurred flurries; for Newton, every feather froze in midair, every wing beat in slo-mo high definition.

"That's a motmot. See there? A tropical kingbird. And to the left, look, a rufous-tailed jacamar."

I tried to follow his words with my binoculars but the avian salvo was too thick and fast. No sooner had I focused on a blue-crowned motmot than an oropendola swooped by. I'd search for that, but then a white-necked jacobin would cock its iridescent head. "You might see 60, 65 different types of birds today," Newton had prophesied when we'd set out that morning. At this rate of spotting, we'd be done by lunch.

Tobago, along with big-sister Trinidad, is the birding capital of the Caribbean. The small twin-island nation, loitering so close to the Venezuelan coast it's practically part of South America, is home to more than 430 species. While you'll see fewer bird types on Tobago (more like 200), the laidback, less-developed little sis is the more spectacular backdrop.

Now, I'm no avian expert. But I do have a heart unfailingly warmed by the sight of a bird in flight (especially ones in pretty colours). I also believe birds are great guides, leading you into wild and beautiful places. Add this to a rumour that Tobago remains one of the most 'authentic' islands in the Caribbean, and I was sold.

## Avian A-Team

My first bird wasn't much of a boast. The cockerel provided a rude alarm call, but roused me for my *buljol* (salt cod) breakfast and early start with Newton George. For avid twitchers, Newton is the first species on any Tobago ticklist. His father was once caretaker of Little Tobago, an uninhabited seabird sanctuary off the north of the main island; a young Newton shadowed dad, and soaked it all up. Subsequently, after over two decades working for the Trinidad & Tobago Forestry Department, there isn't much Newton doesn't know about the lay of his country's land.

As a ranger, he was tasked with protecting the Main Ridge Forest Reserve. Spanning the leafy backbone of the island, the reserve was established in 1776 by the British (who ruled at the time), making it the world's oldest legally protected forest. And it's where Newton and I were headed for my intro to wild Tobago. Until we got waylaid.

Newton detoured into the car park at Argyle Falls. On a normal day we might have taken the short trail leading to the pretty stepped cascade, the island's highest. However, we had other business. "There's a common potoo around here," Newton said, scanning the trees. "It has three different perches; I know two."

And, yes, there it was – a brilliantly bug-eyed bird, sitting motionless on a barren stump. "It always picks a dead bit of branch to sit on so it looks like part of the tree," Newton explained. ►







## Tobago



**Sea in style**  
Castara Bay retains  
a laid-back, local feel  
— helping fishermen  
haul in their nets is  
encouraged



**‘Tobago doesn’t do five-star slick. Many travellers talk of the island’s rustic Caribbeaness; rougher around the edges maybe, but all the better for it’**





◀ Though he'd seen this potoo a hundred (thousand?) times before, he looked as chuffed as if it was his first.

We left the potoo to its statue-ing, continuing up the Roxborough-Parlatuvier Road, which slices through Tobago's tree-cloaked highlands. We were advancing ever deeper into a bowl of greens, a tropical smear of mora, teak, mahogany, pine and palms, of flaming-red immortelles, bromeliads and creepers. But again, Newton was soon distracted – something had caught his ever-watchful eye.

We jumped out of the van just as a pair of orange-winged parrots gave us a fly-by. They mate for life, Newton said, before using his little green laser to point out the hiding place of a golden-olive woodpecker, which was making its loud, signature 'greep'.

In this fashion, we inched slowly up the road. We'd spot a couple of birds, jump back in the van and drive on with the doors slid open, all the better to be able to quickly jump out again. It felt less like birdwatching, more like being in the A-Team. And we hadn't even made it into the reserve yet.

"Look, right there!" Newton hit the brakes. The rarest of Tobago's six species of hummingbird, the white-tailed sabrewing, was *not* playing hard to get – it was brazenly insect-snacking right by the

tarmac. Glittering green, with a blue-violet throat, its wings flapped so fast as to be virtually invisible; it was a tiny, shiny body suspended in a murmuring blur. "A hummingbird might be behind my back," said Newton, "and I can tell which species it is by the sound of its wingbeat."

### Wings, wanders and Wellingtons

Only one road dissects the Main Ridge Reserve, but several trails plunge in. Most popular is the Gilpin Trace but, said Newton, the Spring Trail would be quieter, and better for birds. So, we headed there, stopping briefly to see a man at a truck about some wellies – you can hire a pair for a few TT dollars, to help combat the mud.

Dressed ready for Glastonbury, we set off on the short loop, a chocolatey squelch of leaf litter and palm husks wending via sturdy buttresses and every hue of green. We paused at a trapdoor spider's burrow, where Newton used a twig to carefully lift its ingenious kettle-spout lid, hinged by silks. And we watched a dual carriageway of leafcutter ants charging along the soil. However, despite being in the reserve proper, we saw fewer birds. There was an olivaceous woodcreeper, scurrying up a tree trunk in its quest for insects, and a rufous-breasted wren, which sang us a little ditty. But, largely, the ►

## 'Purple gallinules waded amid a pond of waterlilies while one tree heaved with mohicaned egrets and a gang of green iguanas'

### Fine forest

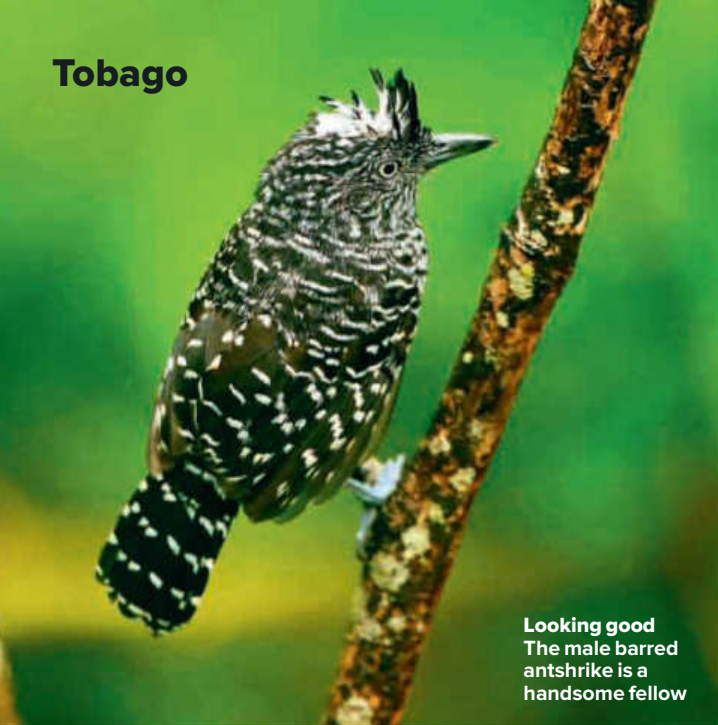
The lush Main Ridge Forest Reserve conceals a wealth of birds – from exotic species to pretty pigeons











**Looking good**  
The male barred  
antshrike is a  
handsome fellow

◀ foliage hid the birds, then a torrent of rain sent them into deeper hiding. Newton fashioned an umbrella from a palm frond, and we continued through the squidge, reemerging onto the road as the downpour came to a stop. This was good timing: several birds emerged too, in order to dry their wings.

“Look! Wow!” Newton urged, excitedly. “A yellow-legged thrush – usually very shy!” I was thrilled to be in this lush new world, with its technicolour inhabitants; though Newton had seen it all before, he seemed to feel exactly the same.

However, you don’t need to give a hoot about birds to enjoy a jaunt over to mile-long Little Tobago. That afternoon, we took a short boat trip there from sleepy Speyside, motoring over the world’s biggest brain corals, and via a private island rumoured to have been owned by Ian Fleming (it wasn’t, but why let the truth spoil a good story?). There was also the chance to jump overboard for a swim en route, which I did, snorkelling over those mighty brains, a flurry of reef fish and a large green turtle.

Little Tobago is also known as Bird of Paradise Island – in 1909 a colony of greater birds of paradise was introduced here, in an effort to save them from the plume trade in Papua New Guinea. By 1963, in part due to devastating Hurricane Flora, the refugees had become extinct. Still, the island remains a sanctuary for many other species.

Having docked at the jetty, I followed Newton up a winding path, through dense foliage. He pointed out the medicinal candle bush, virgin white orchids and handy silver palm – useful for everything from parcelling up fish to weaving hats. Oropendolas were being noisy in the trees and feral chickens peck-pecked amid the anthurium. We were heading for Newton’s favourite lookout, to view birds at their most piratical.

From our vantage, we found raucous skies. Everywhere squadrons of magnificent frigatebirds were air-bombing red-billed tropicbirds, terrorising them into releasing the fish in their beaks. It was celestial carnage, and many of the tropics were flying wounded, with only one elegant tail feather where there should have been two. But, despite this horror, I didn’t see a single frigate secure its hoped-for free meal.

## Nature abundant

Part of Tobago’s appeal to anyone even remotely into nature is that there are birds almost everywhere. On my second day of exploration with Newton, we even crept up on some white-cheeked pintail ducks at the unpromising sounding Sewage Ponds. And when we pulled into the grounds of Tobago Plantation – a former cocoa farm, now

a golf course and hotel – we were barely off the highway before the spotting began. Aningas eating fish; great egrets in flight; tri-coloured herons, abundant as baubles on a Christmas tree. A Jenny jump-up was going bananas, doing its stuck-on-a-trampoline-like display on a dead tree. The lagoon’s caiman looked unimpressed.

The plantation had all sorts of interesting nooks and crannies, to which the golfers were likely oblivious. Purple gallinules waded amid a pond of waterlilies. One particular tree heaved with mohicaned egrets and a gang of green iguanas. There was also a boardwalk through a stand of spindly mangroves, their finger roots encasing us like prison bars; the mangrove cuckoo was elusive in its namesake home, though we saw one later, just by the road.

My favourite bird, though, was the barred antshrike. Not the flashiest thing we saw; rather, a little speckled fellow with a black quiff. We’d seen one in the forest reserve, and I spied – and identified – one here. I felt both unfeasibly satisfied at my mini success and delighted to see this handsome chap hopping in the trees.

I didn’t need Newton’s help to spot the hummingbirds at Adventure Ecovillas later that day. This organic farm and nature reserve at Arnos Vale is a-buzz with hummers: copper-rumped, white-necked jacobin, rufous-breasted hermit, the exquisite ruby topaz. Tens, even hundreds, of them zipped around the sugar-water feeders. They flew so fast I felt drunk – my vision blurred, unable to focus on their details.

I spent the night at the farm, in one of its two raised, rustic, wooden villas, looking out over mango, papaya, guava and cherry trees – all of which I was allowed to pick. I returned to the sugar feeders just after dark to find the night shift had clocked in: the hummingbirds were gone, replaced by bats – just as fast, but with a more leathery flap.

## Living for the lime

Tobago has an understated tourism industry. Most visitors who come here stay in southwesterly Crown Point, home to Pigeon Point’s idyllic – if a little crowded – sands. Even there, though, Tobago doesn’t do five-star slick. Many travellers I spoke to talked glowingly of the island’s rustic Caribbeaness; rougher around the edges maybe, but all the better for it. As I explored I felt this vibe: goats grazed on the verges, bright drive-up shacks sold piles of fresh fruit, and there was an absence of big brands – instead, roadside ads touted Dave & Daughter’s Hardware or the upcoming steel pan ‘Panorama’ contest.

Castara is a good example. This small village on the north coast has a lovely sandy bay, and fine swimming and snorkelling, but there’s not a high-rise or tat-shop in sight. This is just how Steve and Sue Felgate like it. They built Castara Retreats here, a cluster of stylish wooden lodges clinging to the hillside behind, and ensure that their enterprise benefits rather than blights the community. They want to link guests with the village, encouraging them to pop into Cheno’s coffeeshop, buy coconut cakes from the ladies at the bakery or help the fishermen haul in their *seine* nets; thanks to patronage from the hotel, locals have set up everything from laundry businesses to tour companies. Over a passionfruit mojito, Steve told me, “We provide the money to stimulate the economy; the local people provide the happiness and the lime.”

The lime? Steve tried to explain: it’s chewing the fat, hanging out, having deep conversations, drinks... its one of those untranslatable phrases that just, well, is.

I left Steve and walked to my room, a sort-of treehouse perched amid fragrant exotics. I listened as I walked – a certain Newton George once scoured Castara’s gardens and spotted 70 different bird species here. I was on my own, but maybe the grackles and tanagers, the bananaquits and parrotlets – or even my mate, the barred antshrike – would join me for a final lime. 🍋





# Tobago Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Scarborough

**Population:** 62,219

**Language:** English

**Time:** GMT-4

**International dialling code:** +1

**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals

**Money:** Trinidad & Tobago dollar (TT\$), currently around TT\$9.8 to the UK£. There are few ATMs outside the more developed south-west.

### When to go

|     |     |      |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Jan | Feb | Mar  | Apr | May | Jun |
| Jul | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |

■ **Drier season** – though rain still possible; January-March are usually driest. Temperatures in high 20°Cs/low 30°Cs year round. November-April is the best time for birds. Carnival is February/March (8-9 Feb 2016).

■ **Rainy season.** Heavy downpours can occur but clear quickly. Migratory wading birds from North America visit August-September.

### Health & safety

■ No specific vaccinations needed. Chikungunya is present – protect against mosquito bites. Wear sun screen and a hat. Organise comprehensive travel insurance (wanderlustinsurance.co.uk).

### Further reading & information

**Trinidad & Tobago** (Footprint, 2014)  
**Birds of Trinidad & Tobago** (Helm Field Guides, 2011)  
[visittobago.gov.tt](http://visittobago.gov.tt)



### More online

Visit [www.wanderlust.co.uk/159](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/159) for links to more content:

#### ARCHIVE ARTICLES

◆ Caribbean Travel Blueprint: the alternative guide – issue 106

◆ 5 active retreats in Tobago – issue 81

#### PLANNING GUIDES

◆ Trinidad & Tobago travel guide

## THE TRIP

### ✈ Getting there & around

**British Airways** (0844 493 0787, [ba.com](http://ba.com)) flies from London Gatwick to Tobago. Returns cost from around £530; journey time is around 11 hours (the plane touches down in Antigua en route).

**Buses** run around the island, linking Scarborough to places including Buccoo and Charlotteville (both every two hours); see [ptsc.co.tt](http://ptsc.co.tt). **Hiring a car** (offices at the airport) gives greater flexibility.

A **ferry** connects Trinidad and Tobago in 2.5 hours (TT\$50 [£5] one way); internal flights take around 25 minutes.

### £ Cost of travel

Tobago is pretty **good value** for the often-expensive Caribbean. A substantial street-stall meal costs around TT\$50 (£5), a fresh fish dish in a good restaurant around TT\$160 (£16). Bus fares cost TT\$2-8 (20p-80p).

### 🛏 Accommodation

**Castara Retreats** (Castara; [castararetreats.com](http://castararetreats.com)) is a scatter of rustic-chic wooden lodges perched on a hillside. The owners are heavily involved with the local community, and encourage guests to get involved too. Great onsite birding. Apartments from £75; Treetops Lodge from £250.

**Adventure Ecovillas** (Arnos Vale; [adventure-ecovillas.com](http://adventure-ecovillas.com); *pictured*) has two rustic raised cabins set within a bird-filled nature reserve and tropical farm; guests can snack on the garden's fruit trees. Cabins from US\$140 (£93).

**Blue Waters Inn** (Speyside; [bluewatersinn.com](http://bluewatersinn.com)) is a tucked-away beachside hotel, with a dive school and easy access to excellent dive sites. Doubles from US\$196 (£125).

**Native Abode** (Bon Accord; [nativeabode.com](http://nativeabode.com)) is a welcoming spot near the airport, serving traditional breakfasts. Doubles from US\$123 (£78).

### 🍴 Food & drink

Fresh **fish** (snapper, jumbo shrimp, mahi-mahi, grouper) is abundant. **Roti and curry** (often chicken, goat or conch with potato and chickpeas) and **buss-up-shut** (*paratha roti*) are popular. Other local favourites include crab and dumplings with a spicy sauce, *pelau* (pigeon peas and rice with meat and coconut milk), coconut bake (a type of bread made with grated coconut) and *buljol* (salted cod). Look for ice cream in interesting flavours – especially Mama's homemade *soursop*.

**Rum** is the drink of choice. Local beers include Carib and Stag. Angostura Bitters is from Trinidad & Tobago; LLB (lemon, lime and bitters) is a refreshing non-alcoholic option.

## TOBAGO HIGHLIGHTS



### 1 Bon Accord Lagoon

Pick a night around new moon to kayak or stand-up paddleboard with bioluminescence in this mangrove-fringed inlet (US\$60pp [£40]; [standuppaddletobago.com](http://standuppaddletobago.com)). Utterly magical, highly recommended.

### 2 Buccoo

The main street of this coastal village hosts the weekly Sunday School, a mini carnival of music, food and partying, lasting from 8pm into the wee hours. Buccoo is also home to the Easter goat racing (and a goat racing stadium!)

### 3 Main Ridge Forest Reserve

This lush tranche of tropical forest was first protected in the 18th century; several trails lead amid the trees.

### 4 Castara

This village on the northern Caribbean coast is set on a pretty sandy bay and retains a local feel. A quieter, less touristy base than more developed Crown Point.

### 5 Little Tobago

Uninhabited bird reserve off the tip of the north coast; excellent for spotting frigatebirds, boobies and other seabirds.

### 6 Turtle watching

Leatherback, green and hawksbill turtles nest on the beaches of north-west Tobago from March to August (peaking May-June); Save Our Sea Turtles ([sos-tobago.org](http://sos-tobago.org)) offers responsible viewing guidelines.







# Thailand's finest need YOU!

Have you experienced an amazing green project or organisation in Thailand? Then nominate it for the **Thailand Green Excellence Awards UK** – and be in with a chance of winning an iPad Mini or a GoPro camera too!

**T**hailand's combination of wildlife, welcoming communities and wonderfully rich heritage is hard to beat. The country's tropical jungles and turquoise seas are home to a broad range of creatures, from Asian elephants to tiny colourful fishes. Its hills and islands harbour fascinating tribal groups and traditional villages. And everywhere there is cultural intrigue – from the temples and towers of Bangkok to the ancient capital of Ayutthaya to the prehistoric treasures at Ban Chiang.

Now, it's time to reward those tourism organisations that are helping to ensure Thailand's treasures are preserved – by nominating them for the **Thailand Green Excellence Awards UK**. The awards, run in partnership with the Tourism Authority of

Thailand, highlight the country's dedication to the conservation of its precious natural and cultural resources, and support and promote sustainable tourism development. They recognise those in the travel industry that go the extra mile to help Thailand grow as a sustainable destination.

In order to celebrate the amazing organisations and projects that put the animals, people and heritage of Thailand first, we need your help. We want you to nominate businesses that you think are worthy of an award. And when you make a nomination, we'll enter you into a draw to win a GoPro camera. Everyone's a winner!

The awards are split into four categories. Read on to find out more about them – then nominate your Thai green heroes.

## **CATEGORY 1:** **NATURE, MARINE & HERITAGE TOURISM**

Thailand is rich in natural and cultural wonders, and this category is all about celebrating projects, organisations or other bodies that encourage travellers to engage in this richness in a sustainable way.

Last year's winner, Soneva Kiri, is a luxury resort on Koh Kood that takes its carbon footprint very seriously. It has banned imported bottled water, it recycles the majority of its waste, it has embarked on coral and forest restoration projects, and has raised \$5.5m through a carbon levy scheme.

But Soneva Kiri is only one shining example. Your nomination could be a hotel that is proactively pursuing sustainability. It could be





a tour company (based in Thailand or in the UK) that explores Thailand in a particularly sensitive way; it could be a conservation programme. We want nominations for organisations or projects that are proactively protecting Thailand.

## CATEGORY 2: COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

Community-based tourism is the best way to get a real feel for the people of this vibrant country. By staying with, learning from and socialising amid local people – from the hilltribes of the north to the fishermen of the south – you will get a truly authentic experience, and a greater understanding of what makes Thailand tick. Even better, by engaging with community-based and managed projects, hikes and homestays, you are directly benefiting those people.

So, have you experienced a great community-run programme in Thailand? Have you stayed at a hotel with a dedicated 'meet the locals' programme? Have you slept in a fantastic homestay or embarked on a great hilltribe hike that you feel really made a difference – both to yourself and the local people and environment?

Last year's winner was the luxury Sarojin resort, which was rewarded for the way it works in partnership with communities, bringing them together with its guests in a respectful way.

## CATEGORY 3: VOLUNTEERING

Thailand is a popular destination for volunteering, and offers a number of opportunities for altruistic adventurers, from conservation work in its wild national parks to teaching positions and community projects.

Last year's winner, social enterprise Andaman Discoveries, impressed judges with its authentic community-based tours, volunteering opportunities and study trips.

Have you been on an unforgettable volunteering experience that has helped the local community? If so, let us know.

## CATEGORY 4: ANIMAL WELFARE

From spotting elephants in the jungle to visiting gibbon sanctuaries, the possibilities for close interactions with animals is one of Thailand's big attractions. What's also key, though, is knowing that the creatures you're encountering are well looked after by their owners. If you've been impressed with the way a project or organisation has looked after its animals, then this is your chance to see its efforts recognised.

Last year's winners, the Soi Dog Foundation, is a prime example. Soi has sterilised and vaccinated over 72,000 dogs and cats, ensuring Phuket is now rabies-free and therefore safe for visiting travellers.

## HOW TO NOMINATE

To make your nomination – and be in with a chance of winning your choice of a GoPro camera or an iPad Mini – visit [www.thailandgreenawards.com](http://www.thailandgreenawards.com).

Once you've made your nomination, you'll be entered into the prize draw. The competition closes 11.59pm (GMT) on 14 September 2015. There is no cash alternative. The winner will be notified by email after the competition closes.

 **Thailand  
GREEN**  
Excellence Awards 2015

Nominate at [www.thailandgreenawards.com](http://www.thailandgreenawards.com)








# THE BEAUTY OF THE **BOTHY**

Across Scotland – and parts of England and Wales – there is a network of old buildings with incredible views and access to wild places that you can stay in, for free!

WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**

**Wild and free**  
Bothies like this one in the Lake District are available for walkers and outdoor lovers to use – all maintained by volunteers





**Walk this way...**  
Accessing the charity-run mountain bothies requires some legwork, but the walk-in – like this in Scotland's Lowther Hills – is well worth the effort

**T**he air buzzed with conversation. “Where have you come from?” a Scottish voice quizzed. “We’re hoping to cycle to the top of the mountain,” an Australian told two English brothers. While a New Zealander and I chatted about our favourite South Island walks.

Then, the door creaked open. Conversation momentarily stopped while we all eyed up these latest arrivals: a German man and his two Polish friends. “We brought coal!” he announced, and the whole room burst into cheers.

It sounds like an international hostel in just about any big city; a common room filled with strangers meeting and sharing stories. But in fact we were in Scotland on the banks of the Lui Water, in the Cairngorms National Park, in a building known as a bothy. There were no wardens, no booking systems, no payments being made. Bothies, you see, are shelters left open for outdoor lovers to use all over Scotland (and parts of England and Wales) – for free.

I’ve been accessing this network of shelters for the past ten years, but know how novel the idea can sound to the uninitiated. The notion that a landowner would leave one of their buildings unlocked

for people to sleep in, but not charge for the privilege, sounds crazy. And that an entirely donation-funded and volunteer-run organisation – the Mountain Bothies Association (MBA) – exists purely to raise money to maintain and furnish these buildings sounds even more unlikely. But such is the case, and this year the MBA celebrates its 50th anniversary.

## Hut history

Alpenvereinshütten, chatas, wilderness huts, backcountry bunks – even if you’ve never stayed at a British bothy you’ve probably heard of one of their foreign cousins. The idea of staying out in a hinterland cabin is not a new one. The Swiss





## NEED TO KNOW

Bothies are found in Scotland and mountainous regions of England and Wales. Many are looked after by the Mountain Bothies Association (MBA), a volunteer-run and donation-funded charity. If you plan to use MBA bothies, it's recommended that you join, to be kept informed of the latest news/openings/closures and give something back. A year's membership costs £20 (under-16s and over-60s: £10). See [mountainbothies.org.uk](http://mountainbothies.org.uk) for details and to donate.



### Blazing conversation

A bothy's solid fuel stove provides the perfect backdrop for sharing tales of adventures

Alpine Club has built huts for climbers and walkers since 1863; the Appalachian Mountain Club in North America constructed its first backcountry shelter in 1888. And places around the world, from Norway to New Zealand, Poland to Patagonia, are home to networks of cabins that provide beds for weary travellers. Where the bothies in Britain differ is that they were never built for that purpose.

Like many others, the bothy I was staying at in Scotland had had a former life – it used to be an outbuilding of the deerstalker's homestead on the Mar Lodge Estate. It is now looked after by a team of local volunteers outside of the MBA. Buildings like these, along with old

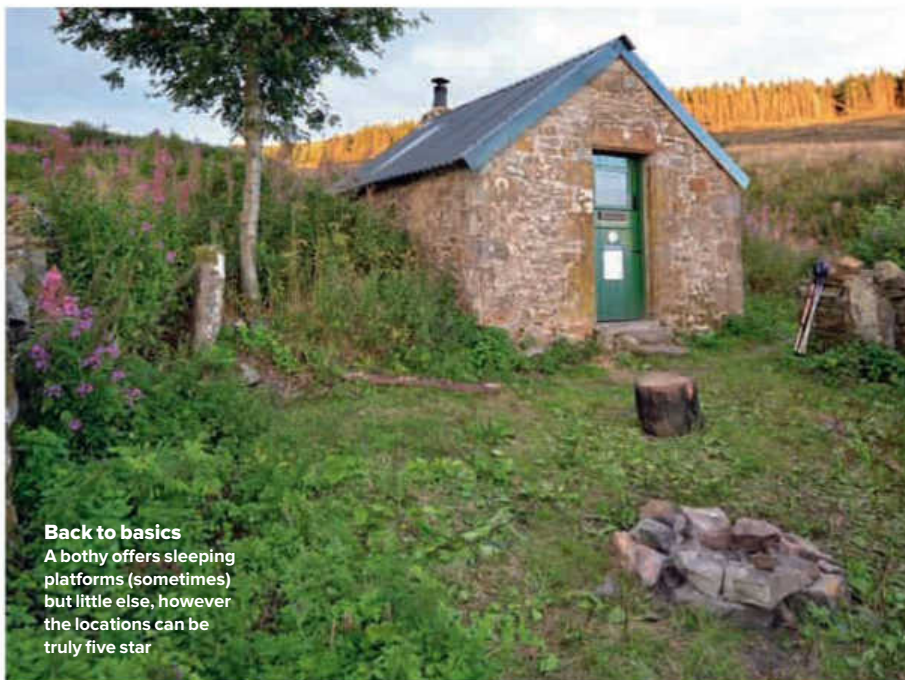
estate-workers' cottages and bunkhouses for quarrymen or dam-builders, used to serve a specific purpose, housing those needing to stay out in wild spots where a commute would have been impossible. This was largely in the 19th century; however, with the arrival of better transport links, agricultural machinery and cheap vehicles, the buildings became obsolete. Slowly they were abandoned to nature, left to the mercy of the elements. However, thanks to husband and wife team Bernard and Betty Heath, and a handful of volunteers, the MBA was formed in 1965, and now these neglected buildings offer refuge to those seeking outdoor adventure.

## Back to basics

The best way to think of bothies is like stone tents. They offer four walls and a roof, sometimes sleeping platforms, often stoves or fireplaces, maybe a table, but that's it. There's no electricity, no gas, no central heating. There's no running water – you use the stream (there's nearly always one nearby). There's no bathroom – but there is a shovel, so you can dig your own. And there's certainly no TV.

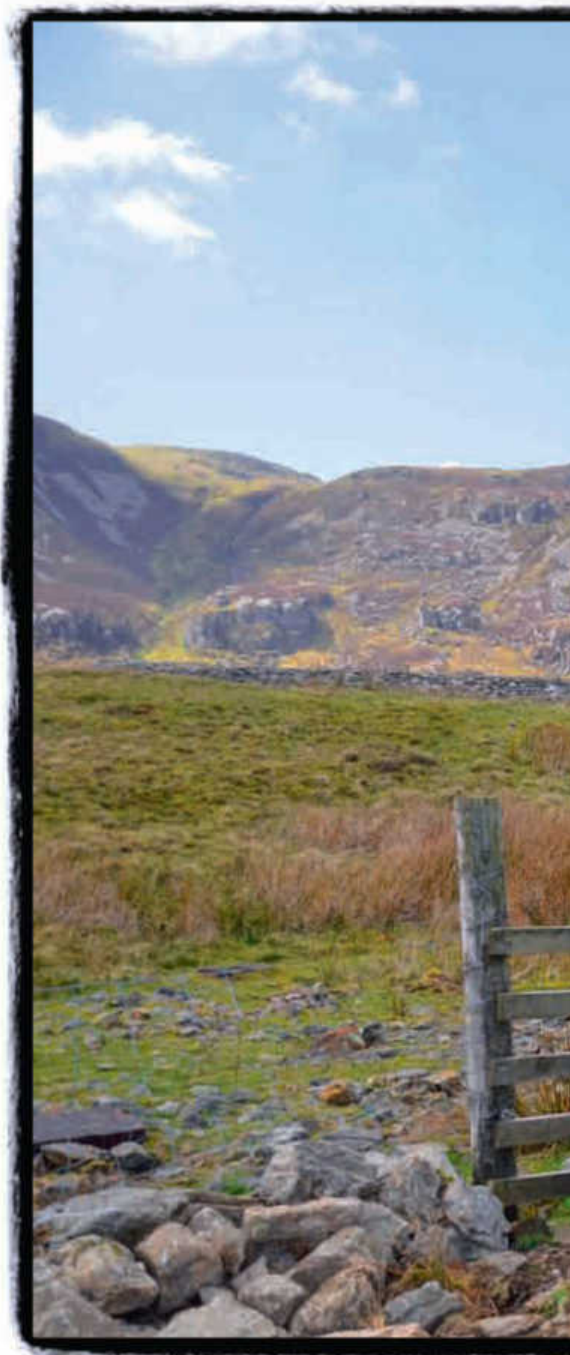
You need to bring all your camping gear – sleeping bag, mat, stove, food, headtorch, some fuel for the fire if you can; you should even bring a tent or bivvy bag in case the bothy is full. There is no way to know if there will be space or not, just ►





#### Back to basics

A bothy offers sleeping platforms (sometimes) but little else, however the locations can be truly five star



◀ as you never know who you might end up sleeping next to – but then that’s half the fun.

## Thrill of the unknown

Recently I took my friend Jon to his first bothy in Northumberland. It was a one-roomed stone building up above a small hamlet called Byrness, deep amid a valley on the English-Scottish borderland. I’d stayed there many times before, and felt lucky that I’d always managed to get it to myself, but impressed on Jon that this was by no means guaranteed.

“Do you think we’ll get there before dark?” he asked as we strode the avenue of conifers. We walked for another

40 minutes, emerging from the trees to hear the babble of Spithope Burn below the path and see the hills on either side begin to glow in the final throes of sunlight.

“There it is,” I said gesturing at the metal roof peeking from behind a rise. Jon looked relieved, but I was happy for a different reason. Inspecting the chimney for smoke (there was none) and the windows for flickering candlelight (only darkness) I knew that – for now – we had it for ourselves.

As we approached the door excitement fizzed in my stomach – the same as it does just before a drop on a rollercoaster, the anticipation of not knowing quite what’s to come. I told Jon to knock first and open

the door, wanting him to experience that same feeling of finding out whether or not the building is free. He obeyed, and immediately an ecstatic look spread across his face: “No one here!”

Within minutes we’d made this uninhabited building homely, setting up our sleeping kit on the bunkbed platforms, setting a fire going, lighting candles and cooking up some food. We chatted about the different bothies I’d stayed at – ranging from small, cosy shelters like this one at Spithope to huge six-roomed affairs in a little-visited corner of England’s Lake District. We leafed through the bothy’s visitor book and, warmed by the fire and soothed by hot drinks, began to get sleepy.



**Bothy beautiful**  
Taking in the Welsh  
mountains from a  
perfectly placed bothy



Jon headed outside to brush his teeth while I cleaned the pots. Suddenly I heard him calling me: “Come quick!”

I rushed over to see him looking worried. “Is that a person coming do you think?” he gestured into the distance.

Between the tree branches on the horizon I could see a little orange light flickering. “It might be,” I said, “you can never assume you have the place to yourself.”

We stood in silence, watching for a while before deciding it might be a light from a distant farm building, distorted by the leaves moving in the breeze.

Excitement over, we headed back inside. I snuggled into my sleeping bag just as rain

started to tap on the roof – surely one of the most satisfying sounds in the world. As I drifted off to sleep I smiled, in love with the unpredictability of staying in bothies – the lack of control you have, even if you’ve planned every detail. For some people it’s too much of a worry; for me it’s a key part of their charm.

## A night to remember

Back in Scotland, our conversations were winding down. One of the mountain biking party had a sheepdog, which nuzzled my legs as I unrolled my sleeping bag. We all started sharing stories as a group, discussing the best viewpoints from bothies we’d stayed at. From coast-fronting spots on the Isle of Skye

to mountainside huts in England and reservoir-adjacent shelters in Wales, there are over a hundred bothies in the MBA’s care alone, and many more private ones, which you learn about through conversations with other bothy users.

Before we all retired to sleep there was a flurry of excitement. One of the Scots went outside for a cigarette and shouted for us to join him: he’d spotted an otter leaping over the hillocks in front of the river. I arrived in time to see its long, dark tail rising and falling, snake-like, as it shot off into the night. Before heading inside I looked up to see another amazing sight – we were far from any light pollution, and the whole sky had become a canvas of twinkling stars. ►





**New lease of life**  
The former 'most remote hostel in Scotland' (above) and old coastguard station on Skye are now available for everyone to use

◀ I slept well that night, warmed by the heat of a room filled with people, happy to have met so many like-minded strangers, and woke to morning sunlight seeping through the windows. Someone was already brewing coffee; they offered me a cup in a whisper and I took it outside to survey my surrounds. The wood-and-stone hut looked like a Swiss log cabin, the trees that grew nearby were alive with birds singing a greeting to the day, and the stream bubbled. It was such a perfect place to spend the night – and morning. I am ever grateful to the tireless work of the volunteers who make staying in these wild places possible.

Inside the hut I could hear more movement. People were making

breakfast, others were packing their kit away, eager to crack on with their day. After a night spent sharing the same wild, unpredictable experience, everyone was relaxed, talking freely, laughing easily. We had all arrived by different means, had taken different journeys to get here, had different stories to tell and soon would leave on different paths. But for one night and one morning we were all united. 📖



**Book of the Bothy** (Cicerone, £12.95) by Phoebe Smith is out 15 August 2015. *Wanderlust* readers get a 25% discount. Enter WANDERLUST at the checkout at [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk).

## Bothy Etiquette

*How to be a responsible bothy user*

### ♦ EVERYONE IS WELCOME

It's not first come, first served; bothies are there for everyone to use, so try to accommodate anyone who turns up. No one should be left out in the cold.

### ♦ BE PREPARED

Always take a tent or bivvy bag with you in case the bothy is full/closed/damaged. Or in case the weather is so good you'd rather camp.

### ♦ DON'T OUTSTAY YOUR WELCOME

The whole point of staying in a bothy is to gain access to wilder places, so get there, stay the night, then move on. Any more than two nights in the same place requires permission. Group numbers should never exceed six. If the estate closes the building temporarily, respect its wishes.

### ♦ USE THE SHOVEL

Very few bothies have toilets so when you need to go, go responsibly. This means digging a hole (15cm deep) at least 200m away from the bothy and at least 50m from any watercourse, and then filling it in afterwards. Carry out all toilet paper and sanitary products. If the bothy does have a toilet, follow its flushing instructions to the letter.

### ♦ LEAVE THE BOTHY IN A BETTER STATE THAN YOU FOUND IT

Take out all rubbish (even if it's not yours), don't leave behind opened food (it can attract mice) and sweep up any debris from the fire. If everyone leaves them clean, everyone finds them clean.





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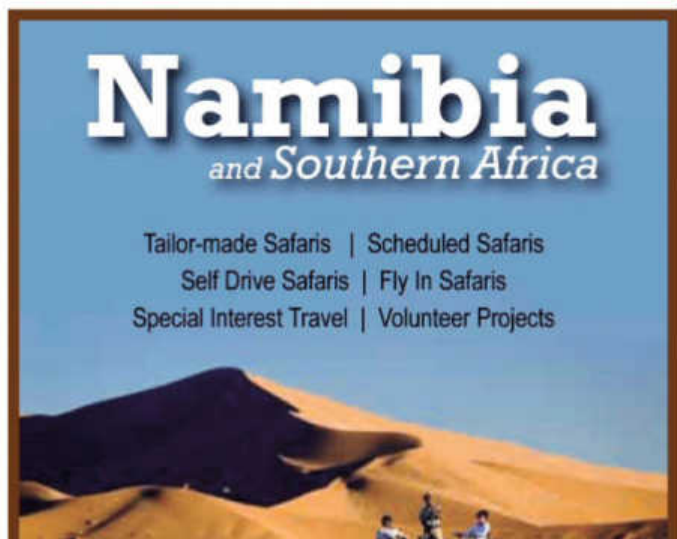
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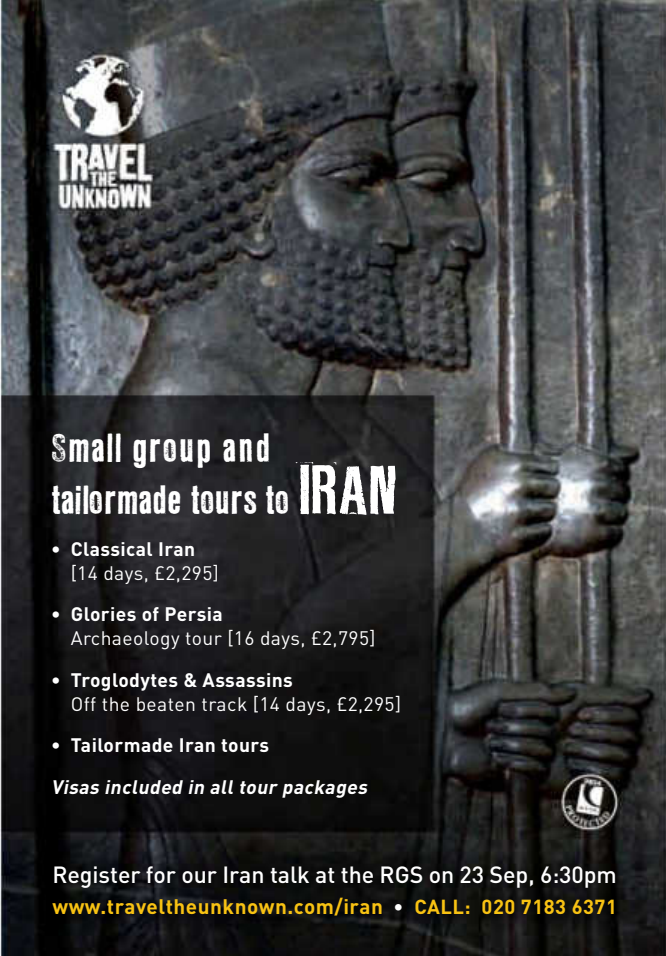
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# How I got into Travel



**Astra Beadle**

**Senior Travel Consultant, *Medway Leisure Travel*, ([medwayleisuretravel.co.uk](http://medwayleisuretravel.co.uk))**

Astra is right at home stringing together unusual itineraries and expanding her world knowledge

## How long have you worked for *Medway Leisure Travel*?

Since September 2006 – nearly nine years!

## What did you do before and what attracted you to the job?

Before, I worked for two different travel companies and prior to that I worked in an animation team overseas. I was attracted to *Medway* as it was closer to home and it's a small independent company.

**What is it like to work for *Medway Leisure Travel*?** It is great to work as part of a small, very close-knit, team.

**What do you like about your role?** I like putting together unusual holiday itineraries as it pushes my knowledge and helps me focus my tailormade skills.

**What challenges have you faced?** My biggest challenge came when I was asked to assist the Groups and Incentives travel teams with manning the travel desk at a big conference in Paris. It was very hard work, but exciting at the same time!

**How has your career progressed at *Medway Leisure Travel*?** I've been privileged to be a part of and see the leisure department grow from two-and-a-half members of staff to the nine we have now!

**Tell us about your favourite moments so far.** I was lucky enough to be chosen to go to Norway to view the northern lights and take part in an exciting husky safari. A once in a lifetime experience!



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ATI.....129..... V, T  
Audley Travel Group.....56, 52..... V, T  
Aurora Expeditions.....56.....  
Bamboo Travel.....46..... V, T  
Caxton.....134.....  
Chameleon Holiday.....129.....  
Chameleon Worldwide.....101..... V, T  
Chinkara Journeys.....132.....  
Cox and Kings.....34..... V, T  
Craghoppers.....68, 69, 71.....  
Destinology.....46.....  
Discover The World.....50..... V, T  
Dragoman.....50..... V, T  
Elizabeth Smith/Teach Yourself...37.....  
Explore Worldwide.....34, 52..... T  
Family Travel Show.....72.....  
Grand American Adventures ....50..... V, T

Greek National Tourism Organisation ..... IFC  
Hayes & Jarvis..... IBC .....  
HF Holidays.....48.....  
HighLives.....132..... V, T  
Holiday Architects.....130..... T  
Intrepid Travel.....34..... V, T  
Japan Custom Tours.....130.....  
Journey Latin America.....32..... V, T  
JTB Europe.....101.....  
KE Adventure.....132..... V, T  
Llama Travel.....132..... T  
Lyon Equipment Ltd.....17.....  
Medway.....46.....  
Mountain Kingdoms.....132.....  
Namibia TB.....3.....  
Oasis Overland.....132..... V, T  
On the Go Tours..... OBC ..... V

Osprey Europe Ltd.....21.....  
Oyster Worldwide.....129..... T  
Paramo.....48.....  
Peru Trip Advisors.....132..... T  
Powertraveller.....136.....  
Rainbow Tours.....52.....  
Ramblers WW Holidays.....101..... V, T  
Regent Holidays.....54..... V, T  
Roarr.....130.....  
SAS Travel Ltd.....132..... T  
Selective Asia.....46..... V, T  
SilverSea Expedition.....54.....  
Steppes Travel.....48.....  
Sunvil Traveller.....132..... V, T  
Thailand Tourist Board ....118, 119.....  
The Great Projects.....129.....  
Tracks Safaris.....56..... V

TransIndus.....56..... V, T  
Travel the Unknown.....131..... V, T  
Tribaltourist.com.....129.....  
Tribes Travel Ltd.....130..... V, T  
Tucan Travel.....32..... V, T  
Undiscovered Destinations ....131..... V, T  
Ventureco Worldwide.....131.....  
Voyager World Travel.....132.....  
Wanderlust Insurance.....133.....  
Wanderlust Tripfinder.....97.....  
Wendy Wu Tours.....101..... V, T  
Wild Frontiers.....15.....  
Wildlife Trails Ltd.....130..... T  
Wildlife Worldwide.....48..... T  
World Expeditions.....131..... V, T

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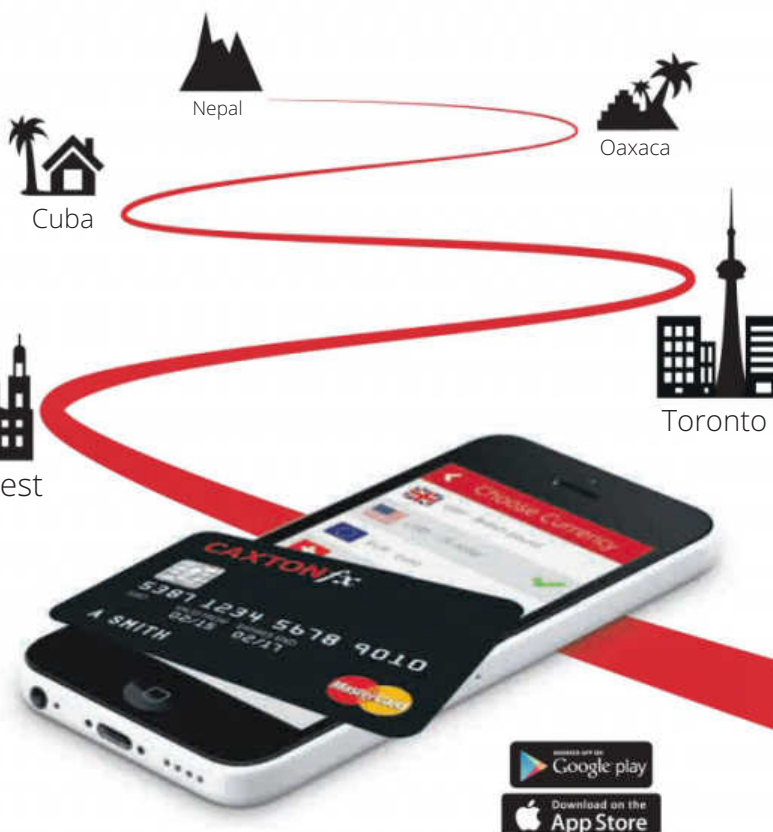
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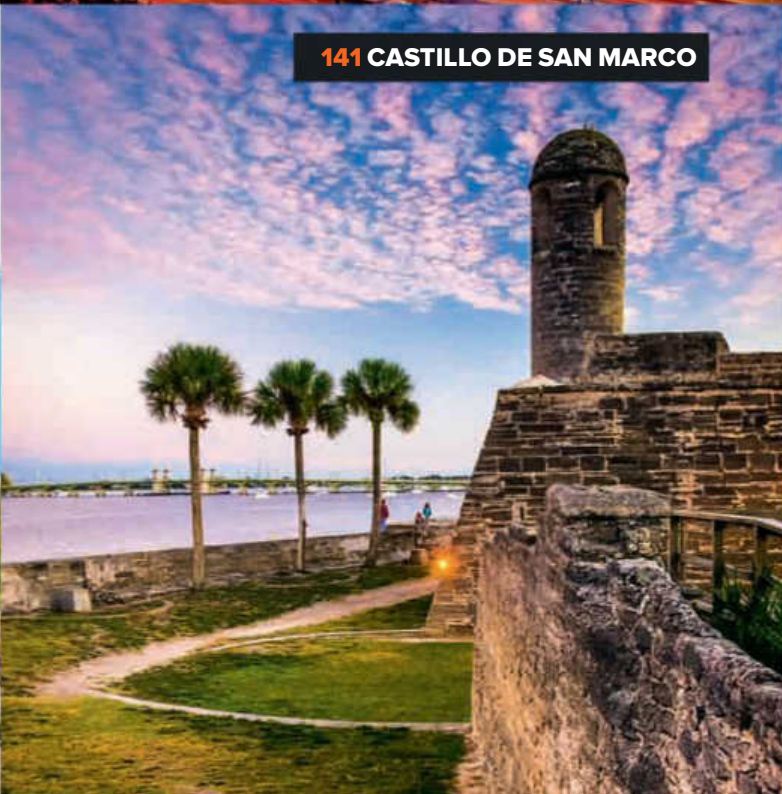
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**Perth's peaks**  
The waterfront skyline reflects in the Swan River



# Perth, Western Australia

Could this be Australia's most liveable city? After heading down under **Lyn Hughes** reckons the sunny, buzzy, beautiful, booming, capital of the west might just be...

## **i** Before you arrive

"Perth? Why would you want to go there?" asked the Australian consultant at a leading travel agency when I was arranging my first trip Down Under, 25 years ago. And he wasn't joking. Ironically, there's every chance he might be living there now. And, if not, he has probably considered it. For Perth is on the up and up, a thriving, cosmopolitan city that's looking to the future with a contagious optimism.

"Welcome to paradise! I love it here," said one local on my recent visit. "It's ten times better than Sydney." This was a sentiment reiterated again and again. Perhaps Perth's isolation (it's closer to Asia than to Sydney or Melbourne) has forced it to be resourceful and outward looking. Its natural beauty – a mix of Indian Ocean coast, the Swan River and Perth Hills – plus a sunny climate certainly make it an enviably liveable city. A free bus service and free WiFi in the city centre both help too.

If you visited even ten years ago, you will be surprised by the changes now. The city is growing, the population is increasingly more diverse, and there is a real buzz about the place. Small bars and cafés are tucked away in heritage buildings, and there is a vibrant restaurant scene with new openings weekly. (Top tip: if you're there in the right season, try *marron*, a crayfish-like crustacean only found in Western Australia).

There are ambitious plans too, with the rail tracks between Northbridge and the CBD (Central Business District) going underground, freeing up lots of new space for yet more bars, clubs, restaurants and retail outlets. Meanwhile, a new marina, shops and restaurants are opening imminently at Victoria Quay.

The boom of the past decade may have slowed down, as has the rest of Australia's economy, but that means it's a little more affordable again – making this the ideal time to visit.

## **✈** At the airport

Flights from the UK to Perth take from 20 hours. The airport is about 12km east of the city. International flights arrive at T1; domestic flights at T2, T3 and T4. The airport is currently very small, and is undergoing a massive redevelopment.

## **🚌** Getting into town

A taxi from T1 to the CBD costs about A\$38 (£18) and takes around 35 minutes. A shuttlebus runs from T3 into Perth (A\$15 [£7]); two public bus services run from T3 and T4 into the city. A free transfer bus connects T1 and T2 to the other terminals. A rail link is planned.

## **🚆** Other ways to arrive

The legendary *Indian Pacific* train connects Perth with Adelaide and Sydney ([railaustralia.com.au](http://railaustralia.com.au)). It runs once a week (twice in peak season); Sydney-Perth takes three days. ►





# ◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

## ■ Essential Info

**Population:** 2 million

**Languages:** English and Aboriginal languages

**Timezone:** GMT+8

**International dialling code:** +61

**Visas:** Required by UK nationals. British citizens can apply for a free eVisitor visa from the Department of Immigration ([www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au))

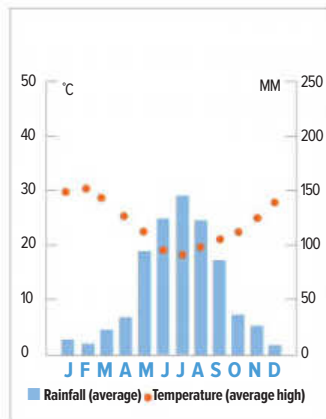
**Currency:** Australian dollar (A\$), currently around A\$ 2.1 to the UK£

**Best viewpoint:** Try Mount Eliza Lookout in Kings Park – overlooking the Swan and Canning rivers as well as the skyline – or Reabold Hill in Bold Park.

**Health issues:** No particular risks. Wear high-factor sun screen.

**Web resource:** [westernaustralia.com](http://westernaustralia.com) [www.experienceperth.com](http://www.experienceperth.com)

**Climate:** Sunny! Perth boasts a Mediterranean-style climate, expect hot summers and cool winters.



## ■ First Day's Tour

Start by taking the Number 37 bus up to **Kings Park and the Botanic Gardens** ([bgpa.wa.gov.au](http://bgpa.wa.gov.au)) – reputedly the largest urban park in the world. There are sweeping views of the city from the park's boardwalks, and you'll get a good introduction to Western Australia's flora and birdlife. The poignant War Memorial is worth the visit alone.

Back down in the city, either explore the shops and cafés of the **West End** or, for a cultural fix, head to the **Perth Cultural Centre** in Northbridge, next to the train station. This complex is home to the excellent **Western Australian Museum** (free; [museum.wa.gov.au](http://museum.wa.gov.au)), which gives an introduction to Perth and WA, as well as the **Art Gallery of Western Australia** (free; [artgallery.wa.gov.au](http://artgallery.wa.gov.au)), which is worth exploring for an hour or two, especially for its indigenous art.

Gold has been key in WA's growth, and the **Perth Mint** (guided tour A\$19 (£9); [perthmint.com.au](http://perthmint.com.au)) gives a surprisingly interesting insight into gold-fever and its impact, with tours, exhibitions and interactive displays.



Take a sunset stroll or cycle along the **Swan River**, which will help you work up an appetite for dinner. Two Feet & a Heartbeat Walking Tours offers a three-hour **Eat/Drink/Walk Perth Small Bar Tour** (A\$50pp (£24); [twofeet.com.au](http://twofeet.com.au)), which will introduce you to some of the city's best establishments. The price includes grazing food and some drinks.

Alternatively, explore the restaurants of the **buzzy Northbridge** area.

## TOP TIP

Central Area Transit (CAT) buses in Perth, Fremantle and Joondalup are free. Frequency varies by route – for services and timetable information, see [transperth.wa.gov.au](http://transperth.wa.gov.au).



## ■ Where to Stay

**Top end:** The new Alex Hotel in Northbridge (50 James St; [alexhotel.com.au](http://alexhotel.com.au)) is very trendy; it has a roof terrace and offers complimentary cycle hire. Doubles from A\$200 (£96). Alternatively, book a premier room at the Pan Pacific Perth (207 Adelaide Terrace; [panpacific.com](http://panpacific.com)). B&B doubles from A\$260 (£135).

**Mid-range:** Also new and in the heart of Northbridge, the Nest on Newcastle (172 Newcastle St; [thenestonnewcastle.com.au](http://thenestonnewcastle.com.au)) is a small boutique hotel. Many of the individually designed rooms have balconies, and there is a roof garden. Doubles from A\$164 (£79).

**Budget:** Just outside Perth, the Fremantle Prison YHA (6A The Terrace, Fremantle.yha.com.au) offers guests the opportunity to sleep in 19th century prison cells – the World Heritage-listed building was transformed into a hostel this year. Dorm beds from A\$28 (£13), double en suites from A\$112 (£54).

**Stay or Go** Perth may be the gateway to the wonders of Western Australia, but spend at least a couple of days exploring its environs. **Fremantle** is an attractive port just south of Perth. It's a hub for the arts, with many street performers and festivals, and a lively bar and café scene. From here it's a short ferry-hop to **Rottnest**, a car-free island that is home to the quokka, a cute and friendly marsupial. Visit for the day, or stay the night. Two Feet & a Heartbeat (see above) offers a half-day cycling tour.

## ■ Stay or Go

Animal lovers with a spare day or two can volunteer at **Native Animal Rescue** ([nativeanimalrescue.org.au](http://nativeanimalrescue.org.au)), north of Perth, which takes in sick, injured and orphaned animals, returning them to the wild when possible.

Wine buffs can explore the 40-plus **wineries of the Swan Valley** on a day trip. There are also plenty of white-sand beaches along the coast. **Cottesloe** is the most famous, and home to a fun Sculptures by the Sea exhibition (above). 





**Majestic mount**  
Mont St-Michel becomes  
a proper island again  
this September



# Mont St-Michel, France

With its ugly causeway gone and restoration work finished, Normandy's rock-top monastery has regained its medieval magic, says **Paul Bloomfield**

To find out what it feels like to be a hobbit, simply pull off your shoes, roll up your trousers and amble to the battlements of Mont St-Michel. Perched atop a rock off the west coast of Normandy, opposite the Brittany border, this World Heritage site is a bastion straight from the imaginations of Tolkien and Peter Jackson, a fortified village that spirals up to the sheer walls of a massive gothic-fantasy abbey.

Standing at the foot of its hefty battlements, I craned my neck to peer up at the glinting spire at its summit. With my toes grubby with silt after a hike across the bay, I succumbed to a serious case of the Frodos, dwarfed as I was by this mighty monument to St Michael. I wouldn't have been at all surprised if an army of orcs had appeared to lay siege.

That's the impact the seaward northern side of Mont St-Michel has, anyway. Not so much the

southern, landside face – at least, until now. Since the first stone causeway was built in 1879, the mount's island-ness has been eroded. And not just by the growing tide of visitors and, later, cars and coaches that crowded the causeway, but also by the sediment building up around the base of the rock.

As of September 2015, that's all changed. A 20-year project to restore the environment has seen the causeway ripped away and a new barrage installed on the Couesnon River, managing the flow of water to flush the accumulated silt from around the mount and pushing back the encroaching saltmarshes. With the last of the diggers removed at the end of the summer, and just a slender, undulating wooden bridge as the vital umbilical cord to the mainland, Mont St-Michel has become an island once more.

This bay experiences the highest tides in Europe; the biggest *grandes marées* top 14m,

when waves surge in 'as swiftly as a galloping horse', Victor Hugo claimed. Visit at the very beginning or end of September and you'll witness water lapping all around the rock fully for the first time in well over a century.

The mount has been a hot ticket almost since it received the celestial seal of approval in AD 708, when Bishop Aubert of nearby Avranches was prodded by the Archangel Michael to build an oratory atop the rock formerly known as Mont-Tombe ('Tomb Mountain').

It's more popular than ever today – in France, only the Eiffel Tower and Versailles receive more visitors. But don't be blinded by the packed main street lined with shops peddling tourist tat. With various ways of admiring its dramatic setting, magnificent abbey and fascinating history, Mont St-Michel remains an unmissable spectacle – more magical than ever now it's free from its concrete shackles. ►



# ◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

## ■ Essential Info

**When to go:** Year round, though high summer is incredibly busy.

**Getting there:** Brittany Ferries ([brittany-ferries.co.uk](http://brittany-ferries.co.uk)) sails Portsmouth-St Malo overnight from £172pp return for car plus two passengers; foot passengers from £80 return. From May to October buses run Tuesday-Saturday from St-Malo to Mont St-Michel ([keolis-emeraude.com](http://keolis-emeraude.com)); buses are less frequent in winter. Shuttlebuses and *maringotes* (horse carriages) run along the bridge from Mont St-Michel car park (parking costs €12.50 [£9]).

**Getting around:** Public transport is limited. A car is almost essential for exploring the region; cycling is a good alternative for the energetic.

**Where to stay:** The beautifully refurbished 18th-century Château de Chantore ([www.chateaudechantore.com](http://www.chateaudechantore.com)) has views of Mont St-Michel; B&B doubles/suites from €165/€250 (£119/180). Le Clos Saint-Gilles ([leclossaintgilles.fr](http://leclossaintgilles.fr)) is a half-timbered

converted leper colony; B&B doubles €98 (£70). Hôtel La Ramade ([laramade.fr/en](http://laramade.fr/en)) is in nearby Avranches; doubles from €75 (£54).

**Where to eat:** Not on the island – it's all overpriced tourist fare, though for a taste of tradition you could try the (expensive) famous omelettes at La Mère Poulard ([merepoulard.com](http://merepoulard.com)). La Grange de Tom ([la-grange-de-tom.fr](http://la-grange-de-tom.fr)), on the clifftop at Champeaux, has a lovely terrace looking towards the abbey.

**More info:** [normandy-tourism.org](http://normandy-tourism.org); [www.ot-montsaintmichel.com](http://www.ot-montsaintmichel.com)



## TOP TIP

A knowledgeable guide can reveal secrets of the abbey's crypts and cells as well as the mount's 1,300-year history; Florence Rocaboy ([florence.rocaboy@laposte.net](mailto:florence.rocaboy@laposte.net)) is recommended.

## Day 1: TACKLE THE MOUNT

Stop at the **visitor centre** by the new car park, to learn about the abbey, the bay's natural history and the restoration ([projetmontsaintmichel.com](http://projetmontsaintmichel.com)). Then stroll or ride the bus to the mount (2.5km), entering via the **Porte de l'Avancée**, the right-hand of the two main gates. Pass the tourist office to join the mass of tourists on the **Grand Rue**, the main (indeed, only) street in the village, which sneaks between the half-timbered houses.

There are a few museums of varying quality. **Archeoscope** (€9 [£6.50]; [au-mont-saint-michel.com](http://au-mont-saint-michel.com)) offers a multimedia introduction, while the **Logis Tiphaine** (€9) recreates the interior of a 14th-century knight's residence. To avoid the crush, duck up steps just inside the inner gate to wind along the **ramparts**, built in the 15th century to defend against English attacks during the Hundred Years' War.



Access the **abbey** itself (€9, audioguide €4.50 [£3]; [mont-saint-michel.monuments-nationaux.fr](http://mont-saint-michel.monuments-nationaux.fr)) via the huge guardroom. Climb the 350 steps of the **Grand Degré** to reach the abbey church, a romanesque-gothic concoction started in AD 1000 and enhanced in the 15th century; the slender spire topped by a **gilded St Michael** was added in 1897. Explore the cloisters, refectory, scriptorium, guests' hall, knights' hall and pilgrims' almonry of the **Merveille**, the 13th-century edifice built on the steep north slopes.

## Day 2: CROSS THE BAY

There's plenty to see outside those mighty walls. Rise early for an aerial perspective: Régis Mao offers morning flights over the mount in his **microlight** or Bond-esque **gyrocopter** (€80/90 [£58/65] for 20 minutes; [normandie-uhl.com](http://normandie-uhl.com)), with views of the saltmarshes and sweeping bay almost as spectacular as the abbey itself.

Timings for the rest of the day depend on water levels – check the **tide tables** at [ot-montsaintmichel.com/en/horaire-marees/mont-saint-michel.htm](http://ot-montsaintmichel.com/en/horaire-marees/mont-saint-michel.htm). Just before low tide, set out across the treacherous sands in the company of an experienced

guide on one of the regular **bay walks** (from €5.50pp [£4] depending on numbers; [cheminsdelabaie.com](http://cheminsdelabaie.com)); walks run from the coast at Genêts, following in the bare footsteps of centuries of pilgrims. You'll learn about the perils of quicksand and the rapidly changing tides, as well as the history of **Tombelaine**, Mont St-Michel's twin island just to the north, from where English troops plotted (unsuccessfully) to take the holy rock.

At higher tides, experienced **kayakers** can paddle to Tombelaine or Mont St-Michel (from €25 [£18]; [seakayak-fr.com](http://seakayak-fr.com)).

## Day 3: WANDER FURTHER

Ever wonder what happened to St Aubert, the abbey's founder, and the manuscripts produced by those assiduous medieval monks? The answers lie in the nearby town of **Avranches**, where Aubert was serving as bishop when he was visited in a trio of visions by St Michael. His skull, pierced by the finger of an irritated archangel to provoke the founding of the island abbey, can be seen in its gilded reliquary in the **Trésor de Saint-Gervais** in the basilica of the same name (free).

Less macabre is the **Scriptorial** (above; €7 [£5]; [scriptorial.fr](http://scriptorial.fr)), an illuminating modern museum that

displays the many manuscripts painstakingly inscribed by the monks of Mont St-Michel, and puts their work in fascinating context.

For yet more dramatic views of Mont Saint-Michel, hike a section of the GR223 or **Sentier des Douaniers (Custom Officers' Path)**, a walking trail that loops some 430km around the Cotentin Peninsula from Isigny, near the D-Day landing beaches, to the mount. The 17km leg from Carolles to Genêts provides spectacular vistas of the abbey from the clifftops of les Falaises at Champeaux and includes the most beautiful kilometre in France – allegedly. 📍







**Spanish stones**  
The Castillo was built by the Spanish in the 17th century



# Castillo de San Marcos, Florida, USA

As St Augustine – one of the USA's oldest European settlements – celebrates its 450th anniversary this September, we break in to its mighty old fortress

## Get orientated

Florida is better known for fake Disney castles than bona fide 17th-century fortresses – but actually has both. Castillo de San Marcos has been protecting the Sunshine State city of St Augustine for more than 300 years. It was built by the Spanish between 1672 and 1695 to safeguard the gold and silver being shipped from the Caribbean to Europe. It changed hands several times before finally being taken by the Americans in 1821.

Complete with drawbridges, courtyards, cannons and a gun deck, the fort was subsequently used as a military base and prison for 200 years. It is now the main attraction in St Augustine, a city that – this September – celebrates its 450th anniversary, making it the USA's oldest continuously occupied European settlement.

## Getting there & around

There are direct flights to Orlando (225km south of St Augustine) from many UK cities.

St Augustine is easy to explore on foot. Alternatively, the Sunshine Bus Company ([sunshinebus.net](http://sunshinebus.net)) runs services across the city; singles cost US\$1 (64p), a one-day pass costs US\$3 (£1.90). Buses run Monday-Saturday, 7am-6pm.

Several tour companies offer hop on/hop off land train tours that stop at historic sights; Old Town Trolley Tours ([trolleytours.com/st-augustine](http://trolleytours.com/st-augustine)) offers a three-day pass for US\$26 (£17).

## The visit

Entry to Castillo de San Marcos ([nps.gov/casa](http://nps.gov/casa)) costs US\$10 (£6.40); tickets are valid for seven days. Spend time exploring the grounds,

the old city gates and the perimeter wall – St Augustine is one of only three walled cities in North America. On some weekends, guides fire the cannons and stage historic re-enactments.

Don't just visit the Castillo. The Spanish exerted their influence throughout St Augustine, as is evidenced by the Spanish Renaissance-inspired Flagler College, completed in 1888. This hotel-turned-college has a flamboyant interior, decorated with Austrian chandeliers and Tiffany stained glass. It is open for public tours year round (US\$10 [£6.40]); see [legacy.flagler.edu/pages/tours](http://legacy.flagler.edu/pages/tours) for times and dates.

A festival will mark St Augustine's 450th anniversary (4-8 September; [staugustine-450.com](http://staugustine-450.com)) consisting of five days of music, processions, fireworks and historic re-enactments. ►





## ◆ Bastions

The star-shaped fortress is protected by four bastions – San Pedro in the south-west corner, San Agustín in the south-east, San Carlos in the north-east and San Pablo in the north-west. Three of the bastions had a watchtower and a cannon deck to cover each corner of the fort, while San Carlos was seen as the main lookout point, with a taller watch and bell tower. From here, a giant beacon light was kept burning to help guards and soldiers keep watch through day and night.

## ◆ Plaza de Armas

Inner courtyard, armaments and drill ground.

## ◆ Moat

This was usually kept dry most of the time but was flooded prior to attacks from the enemy. It could be flooded to a depth of a foot during high tide with seawater from Matanzas Bay, using the floodgates built into the quay wall.

## ◆ Ravelin

This triangular barbican was supposed to protect the gate into the fort and remains the only part of the medieval structure to be left incomplete.



## ◆ Flying the flag

The burgundy cross of the Spanish colonial flag flies at full mast.



## ◆ Cannon & mortar deck

Rows of heavy iron and bronze cannons and mortars remain from when they guarded against the Americans and British.

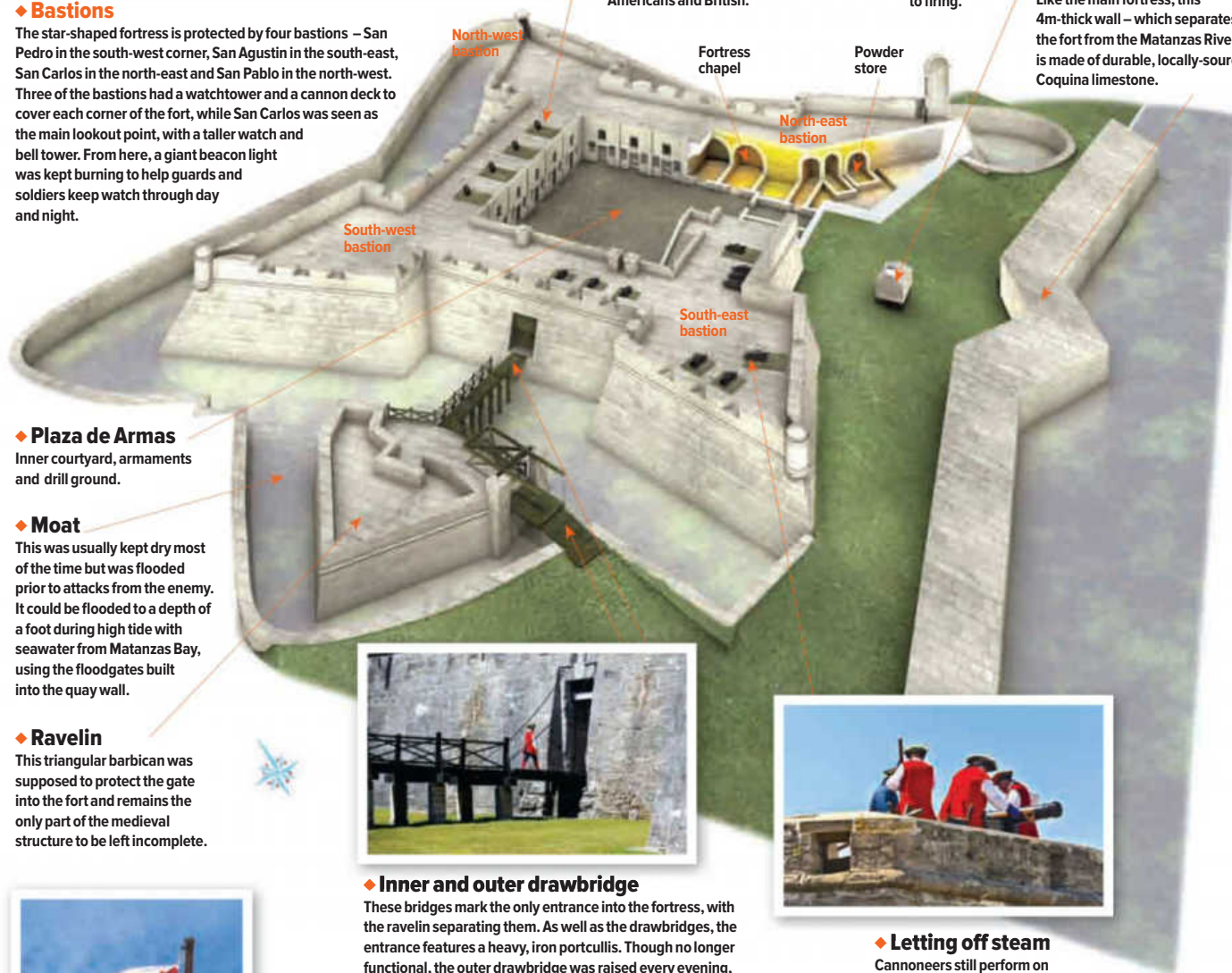


## ◆ Oven

Here, cannonball shots were heated red-hot prior to firing.

## ◆ Quay Wall

Like the main fortress, this 4m-thick wall – which separates the fort from the Matanzas River – is made of durable, locally-sourced Coquina limestone.



## ◆ Inner and outer drawbridge

These bridges mark the only entrance into the fortress, with the ravelin separating them. As well as the drawbridges, the entrance features a heavy, iron portcullis. Though no longer functional, the outer drawbridge was raised every evening, while the inner was only lifted in the event of an attack.



## ◆ Letting off steam

Cannoneers still perform on special occasions.



## ■ Essentials

**Language:** English

**Time:** GMT-5 (March-Oct GMT-4)

**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals; ESTA needed

**Money:** Dollar (\$), currently \$1.6 to the UK£

**Health:** Take sun protection and good insurance



This feature is adapted from Marco Polo's *Travel Handbook: Florida*, which contains infographics, insider tips, tour suggestions and a large pull-out map. See [marco-polo.com](http://marco-polo.com)



**Wanderlust**  
TRAVEL MAGAZINE

# Next issue

ON SALE 17 SEPTEMBER

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**Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City by the *Reunification Express***

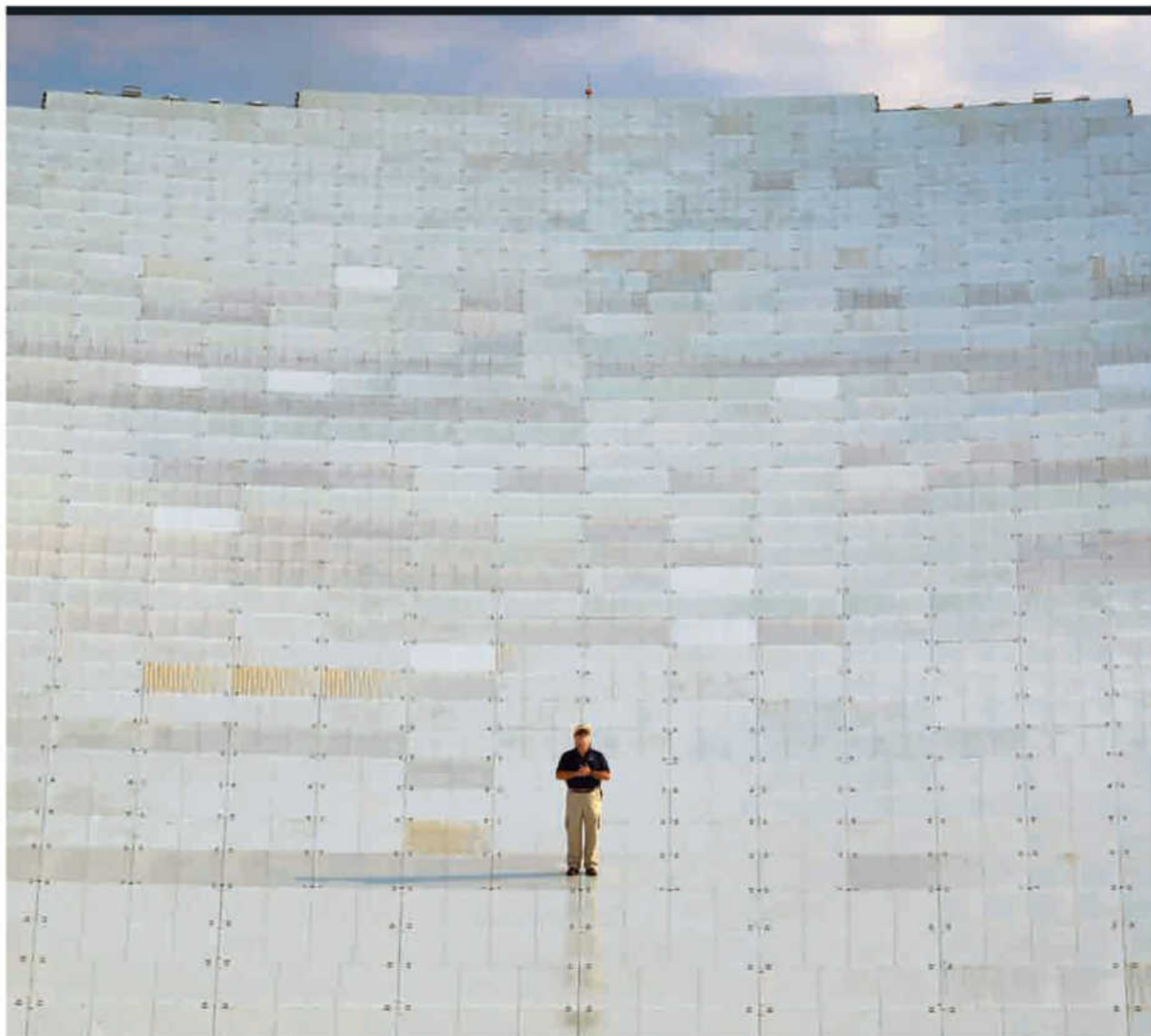
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Somehow, the Virginias' wild, rugged, mountainous scenery remains relatively undiscovered by travellers outside the USA. It's off the beaten track. And, actually, it's also off the grid. In the 34,000 sq km National Radio Quiet Zone, on the Virginia/West Virginia border, radio transmissions are restricted by law, in order that the enormous, hypersensitive Robert C Byrd Green Bank Telescope (GBT) can work without interference. Which means mobile phones are banned, as are petrol cars, microwaves and even hoovers. Inconvenient for some; perfect for those who want an escape from modern life.

Photographer Emile Holba has explored the zone and the GBT (which can detect waves emitted just after the universe began). To learn more, visit [emileholba.co.uk](http://emileholba.co.uk) or listen to his BBC Radio 4 reports at iPlayer Radio: 'Welcome to the Quiet Zone'.



Emile Holba





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